

CHAPTER ONE

THE
LEAVE US
ALONE COALITION

What is today's center-right movement? What are the building blocks of the modern conservative movement that engulfs and buttresses the Republican Party, reinvented and restructured by the Reagan revolution? How has this movement grown and how is it held together? How is it able to vie for political power in America?

The center-right movement, the political movement created out of the defeated minority Republican Party of midcentury and sculpted by Ronald Reagan's political leadership and lifetime, is a coalition of groups and individuals that have one thing in common. They do not want the government to give them something. Or take something from others. On the key issue that motivates their vote, they want one simple thing from the government: They just want to be left alone.

They are taxpayers who want lower taxes. Businessmen and -women, entrepreneurs, investors who wish to run their own affairs without being regulated and taxed out of existence. Property owners who do not wish to be taxed out of their homes or property. Gun owners protective of their Second Amendment rights. Homeschoolers who are willing to spend the time and energy to educate their own children, asking only that the government leave them alone. Conservative

Catholics, evangelical Protestants, Orthodox Jews, Muslims, and Mormons, all members of the various communities of faith who wish to be left alone to practice their faith and pass it on to their children.

This movement is not simply a collection of unrelated interest groups in a marriage of convenience.

Pollsters can cajole citizens into answering twenty questions about twenty issues. But what matters in politics is the one issue that moves a citizen to vote for or against a candidate. The Leave Us Alone Coalition is brought together by many issues. Its members do not necessarily agree on some manifesto or confession of belief. There is no checklist where all members must agree on twenty articles of faith. Or ten. Or two. They find themselves shoulder to shoulder working together for the same candidates and over time the same party because on the issue that moves each of their individual votes—not necessarily on all or even most issues—what they want from the government is to be left alone.

Who are the members and leaders of the Leave Us Alone Coalition?

TAXPAYERS

First and foremost they are taxpayers, those Americans whose primary vote-moving issue is keeping their taxes low. They believe the paychecks they earn belong to them. They react strongly to all efforts to raise their taxes. They have flowing in their veins the blood of the Sons of Liberty who created the American Revolution in response to direct taxation by the British Crown. More recently they reacted strongly to Democrat Walter Mondale's promise (threat) in 1984 that he would raise their taxes and to Republican President George H. W. Bush's breaking of his no-tax-hike pledge in 1990. In California in the 1970s, men like Howard Jarvis and Paul Gann and Lew Uhler led the fight against rising property taxes and ran Proposition 1 in 1970 and then Proposition 13 in 1978, which ignited the nationwide taxpayer revolt that swept Ronald Reagan into the presidency.

In 1980, Barbara Anderson led the taxpayer movement in unlikely Massachusetts that saw "Proposition 2½" passed by Bay State voters

on the same night the state voted for Reagan. She remembers her Democrat parents, who owned a mom-and-pop hardware store, complaining about taxes and the arrogance of government in the same sentence. As a navy officer's wife, she saw federal government waste up close. As a young mother, she read about state and local government mismanagement while struggling to pay state and local taxes. Her second husband, who worked long hours of blue-collar overtime, described a proposed state graduated income tax as "the one where the harder you work the more they steal from you."

Then, in 1974, she heard a local official say about another property-tax increase: "Get used to it, folks; they're going up every year." She joined Citizens for Limited Taxation (CLT) as a volunteer that week, in rebellion against that attitude even more than the taxes themselves. She collected 4,800 signatures for a constitutional amendment initiative for tax limitation in Massachusetts.

She joined the staff of CLT in 1978. She later became the executive director on July 1, 1980, and ran the successful campaign for Proposition 2½, which cut property taxes in Massachusetts to 2.5 percent of fair market value, limited levy increases to 2.5 percent a year, and required a vote of the people in any town or city to raise additional property taxes over the limit. Proposition 2½ is a law, unlike California's famous Proposition 13, which is a constitutional amendment, but Barbara Anderson's force of personality and organized taxpayer movement have largely kept the legislature and several governors from messing with it.

Other Americans enter the taxpayer movement after having viewed the spending side of government and wondering if what we pay for is actually a net positive.

Jeff Ballabon, a New York-born young professional and now a conservative leader, was raised in a family that was generally supportive of the idea of a comforting welfare state. His personal turning point came when he was a young congressional staffer working for moderate John Danforth of Missouri. He attended a meeting on welfare reform and expressed what he thought was a commonsense observation that job training might help welfare recipients move from dependence

to lives as independent actors able to provide for themselves and their families.

The room of largely Democrat staffers and welfare-rights activist organizers turned on him. Someone shouted, “You are stigmatizing nonwork.” There was cursing and more shouting. Jeff and his heretical ideas were asked to leave the room.

“Walking back to the office and assimilating what I’d witnessed,” Jeff recounts, “it became clear to me how their policies were focused entirely on maintaining political power over an enslaved class of the neediest people, destroying generations of Americans by enforced dependence. I was depressed, then angry, and finally determined to focus on freeing people from government ownership.

“I knew lots of decent, well-meaning folks, my parents included, were ardent supporters of welfare programs. That was because they viewed it as a backstop and just assumed that of course people are all doing their best to get away from welfare and get on their own two feet. They didn’t see the corrupt politics of political slavery and couldn’t imagine the psychological, emotional, and developmental damage done to the “beneficiaries” of the programs.

“From that point on, I guess I became a conservative. I viewed every domestic federal program with suspicion.”

Some taxpayers have organized their town, county, city, or even state taxpayers’ organization. Others simply vote for the candidate who will reduce their tax burden. These tax-motivated voters do not want taxes raised on others. They just want to be left alone.

Let’s be clear. Not every taxpayer becomes a Reagan Republican. But those citizens whose vote is motivated by their tax burden and a desire to reduce it are charter members of the Leave Us Alone Coalition, and today they vote for the Reagan Republican candidates.

BUSINESSMEN AND -WOMEN

A second group in the coalition is small-businessmen and -women, the self-employed, independent contractors, franchisees, and entre-

preneurs who do not want their businesses overtaxed or regulated. They do not ask for favors from the government. They simply wish to be left alone. (There *are* businessmen who want the government to provide subsidies or to kneecap their competition—they are not part of this coalition. They bat for the other team.)

The rhetoric of the Democrats since the Great Depression is that government can or should “create” jobs, or “give” you a job. Jobs are, of course, not created by government. The government can take the money out of the real economy (defunding a job in the private sector) and drag the money into the government coffers and spend it to “create” a new job. This is the economic equivalent of taking a pail of water out of one side of a lake and walking around the lake—spilling some of the water—and then holding a press conference surrounded by cameras to be filmed pouring what is left in the bucket into the lake. “Vote for Fred, he is filling up the lake with water.” Government cannot create. It can only take and relocate. It cannot give you anything, including jobs, which it didn’t take by force in the first place.

Self-employed Americans, small-business owners, franchisees, and independent contractors best understand that jobs are created, not given. They have created their own job. They maintain it. They create jobs for others. They feel taxes and regulations intensely, not like the princess and the pea cushioned by a dozen mattresses, but more as the shoeless soldier at Valley Forge felt the frozen ground. Government cannot hide its rough edges, the true costs and damage done to the self-employed. The smaller the business, the more likely employees are to see the direct link between individual initiative and success and the dead hand of government and lower wages, lost days, and lost jobs.

Some eleven million households pay their taxes quarterly.¹ Their federal and state income tax burden is not hidden by the withholding of taxes from paychecks. Some Americans look only at their total take-home pay and overlook the FICA taxes and income taxes that come out of the paychecks. Those who pay their federal taxes quarterly vividly see and feel the cost of government and may better judge whether they are getting their money’s worth.

Businesswoman and entrepreneur Kathy Gornik represents millions of Americans who vote to be left alone to run their own business. She was born in Cleveland to Yugoslavian immigrant parents, who were Democrats. When she got out of school in Kentucky she borrowed \$20,000 from family and friends, and with a friend from college, she started Thiel Corporation, producing high-quality audio systems. Thiel now employs thirty men and women and exports to thirty-two foreign countries.

She says she “detests” politics, but “politics loves me.” Meaning that government has a strong interest in the money she earns and takes much of it. She says, “I just want to be left alone.”

Thiel is a subchapter S corporation, like 3.5 million others in America, so Gornik writes four checks a year to the IRS. Their taxes are not silently or “painlessly” removed through withholding.

There are millions of small businessmen and -women and self-employed in America. The Census Bureau records 27 million businesses. Nineteen and a half million of them have no employees beyond their owners, 5.3 million have twenty or fewer employees.² About 757,000 Americans run their own franchises, operating restaurants like McDonald’s, Subway, or Burger King, and services like Jiffy Lube and Curves. There were an estimated 14.1 million direct sellers in 2005, including self-employed salesmen for Alticor (parent company of Amway), Mary Kay, and Avon.³

Other Americans sell without working through a national network. More than seven hundred thousand Americans sell on eBay as their primary or secondary source of income.⁴ (Full-time eBay sellers outnumber full-time steelworkers.)⁵ They are, in effect, self-employed independent contractors. They feel every tax. Democrats believe that the hardworking man or woman working two jobs must want government help. That person specifically has gone to great lengths to turn down the government’s offer to “help” them outside of work. The gulf between that hard worker and someone on welfare or the possessor of a no-show, sometimes-show government job is greater than the gulf between that worker and Bill Gates.

The state can offer little or nothing to these self-employed people

and small-business employees other than the pain of taxation and the bother of regulatory burdens. Employees in large companies can be misled on the cost/benefit analysis of government. In the past the government could tax General Motors and hand each of the workers on the assembly line some little benefit. They would directly see the benefit and only indirectly feel the cost.

When a hundred workers are laid off by General Motors to pay the taxes for some new environmental fad or government spending program, who makes the connection? The politicians would claim the money was free, came from nowhere, had no cost, was being paid for by others—the big corporations. For the self-employed and small-business employee, politicians cannot loot the company and then pretend they are handing free stuff to employees/voters that came from nowhere. The cost of government is painfully transparent.

The costs of regulations imposed on small businesses by city, state, and federal governments are felt indirectly in higher prices by all Americans. The self-employed and small-businessmen feel not only the cost, but the hassle and humiliation of bureaucrats up close and personal, day after day. You and I visit the Department of Motor Vehicles every few years to renew a driver's license. A small-businessman must deal with dozens of agencies with the same power to withhold and delay and the same cheerful attitude and sense of urgency that we meet at the DMV.

As a result, the self-employed, small-businessmen, franchisees, direct sellers, and independent contractors tend to ask only to be left alone.

THE SECOND AMENDMENT VOTER

Add to taxpayers and businessmen those voters whose primary vote-moving issue is the Second Amendment. There are ninety million gun owners in the United States and as many as twenty million hunters. Of course, not every hunter or gun owner is a member of the Leave Us Alone Coalition. Some hunters vote on an issue other than guns. But those gun owners who do vote on the Second Amendment are strong members of the coalition.

The gun issue has brought a surprising number of Americans into the Leave Us Alone Coalition. Witness Sandy Froman who might not have been expected to be “on the right” when she grew up in liberal San Francisco and went to Stanford University and Harvard Law School. A self-described five-foot-two Jewish woman, she was thirty-two, recently divorced, and living alone north of Los Angeles when a criminal tried to break into her home through her front door. A call to the police elicited the helpful advice that she go into her bedroom and lock the door. Neighbors did not respond. The police did not show up until the would-be intruder had given up and left.

Sandy had never fired a gun before. She did not grow up around guns. But as she cowered defenseless in her home, she “decided then and there I was never going to be that helpless again.”

The next day she signed up for a gun-safety course at the local range and bought a Colt M-1911 pistol. “Buying that gun and becoming competent with it gave me confidence that I could defend myself,” she said.

Sandy Froman also joined the NRA (National Rifle Association) that year. Eleven years later, in 1992, she was elected to the board of directors of the NRA in the same election that brought Charlton Heston to his historic five-year presidency. Then, in 2005, she was the second woman to be elected president of the NRA.

Americans who vote their Second Amendment rights as the “First Freedom” fit comfortably in the Leave Us Alone Coalition. They do not want anything from anybody. They simply wish to be left alone with their guns. They do not go door to door urging everyone else to own guns. They do not insist that fourth-grade students in public schools be taught books entitled *Heather Has Two Hunters*.

HOMESCHOOLERS

The coalition has a small but powerfully motivated group of parents who have decided to educate their own children at home. They have declined the kind offer of the state to “educate” their children for free. One parent usually has to sacrifice the opportunity to work outside

the home and give up one income in order to be both parent and teacher. This movement grew in response to unhappiness with the quality of public education and, for some, the concerns of religious parents about the increasingly secular school system.

Homeschoolers became a growing phenomenon and a political force largely through the leadership of Michael Farris, a lawyer in Washington State who was the son of a public-school principal. Farris had begun to educate his children in a local Christian private school when he met Raymond Moore, an early proponent of homeschooling, who made a simple argument, “People get their values from the people they are around.”

Farris and his wife wanted their children to share their values, not someone else’s, and so they began to homeschool in 1982. As word got around that a smart young lawyer was homeschooling his growing family, he was asked by more and more families to help them in arguments with local authorities who challenged their ability to homeschool. By 1983, Mike Farris founded the Home School Legal Defense Association and moved to the Washington, D.C., area to run this growing national association—the ACLU for homeschooling families. In 2000, Farris founded Patrick Henry College in Virginia as a university catering to students who were homeschooled.

Today homeschoolers are 1 or 2 percent of the population. They punch above their weight class, as they have been toughened up by defeating the teachers unions’ efforts to criminalize homeschooling. Now an organized force, homeschoolers do not ask for anything from the government. They do not ask that their sacrifice be celebrated as an alternative lifestyle. They simply wish to be left alone.

PROPERTY RIGHTS ACTIVISTS AND HOMEOWNERS

Property owners simply wish to be left alone in their homes, shops, farms, and ranches without the fear that the mayor might expropriate their land to give it to one of his favorite political contributors to build a shopping mall or sports stadium or because it rained last night and Al

Gore now claims their backyard as a wetland. This impulse has been organized into thousands of local property rights groups that arise when local, state, or even the federal government have threatened men and women who simply wish to be ignored by the state. This has become a national movement largely through the efforts of Chuck Cushman.

Cushman was raised a Democrat in California. In 1962, the federal government forced Chuck Cushman's father to sell his inholding—private property located within the Yosemite National Park. He was told to sell or lose his job. He sold. In 1970, Chuck purchased an inholding in Yosemite. When the feds came for his property and tried to pressure him and his neighbors to selling their land to the government, he chose to fight. He organized his fellow property owners in self-defense. They won and saved their entire town of Wawona. Chuck kept going. He organized his fellow inholders into the National Park Inholders Association. Chuck Cushman's defense of property rights was not only a national example that inspired thousands—he created a national network, the American Land Rights Association. Today Cushman helps organize, train, and coordinate the more than two thousand property-rights groups across the fifty states.

Cushman's more rural property-rights activists are joined by homeowners who wish to protect their homes from slow-motion expropriation through high property taxes, zoning changes, or high crime rates that drive down property values. Expensive and/or incompetent local government threatens to destroy the life savings of those whose largest investment is their home. These were the shock troops of the taxpayer revolt in 1978's Proposition 13.

THE COMMUNITIES OF FAITH AND PARENTS' RIGHTS

The coalition also includes those Americans whose central concern is practicing their religion and raising their children in that same faith. They have been called the "religious right." This confuses the heck out of the establishment press that cannot understand how

evangelical Protestants, both fundamentalist and Pentecostal, conservative Catholics, Orthodox Jews, Muslims, and Mormons can all cheerfully be in the same political movement. Shouldn't they be fighting each other? They do not agree on who gets into heaven. They don't have to. They realize that if they are to practice their faith their way they need to stand politically with others of different faiths who want the same freedom. They are political allies, even if the other fellow is going straight to Hades given his flawed understanding of scripture.

Religious differences used to drive voters of different faiths into different parties. Catholics and Jewish immigrants were made to feel unwelcome by Protestant Republicans. In 1928, Al Smith, the first Roman Catholic nominated to run for president as a Democrat, lost solid Democrat—and Protestant—southern states to Herbert Hoover.* As late as 1980 there were serious debates within evangelical and Pentecostal Protestant circles about how healthy or wise it was to be working side by side politically with those fellow Protestants whose theology was suspect.

Over the years the aggressively secular left has created a more ecumenical right.

No single religious denomination in America has ever been strong enough to dominate American politics. Each understood that. They now feel more threatened by a secular state ridiculing their faith and undermining their parental authority through government-run public schools that claim their children from kindergarten through state universities. The largest religion in America is Roman Catholicism with 25 percent of the population.⁶ Baptists weigh in at 16 percent and Methodists at 7 percent.⁷ In other nations where there is an obvious majority or minority—Hindus in India, Muslims in Saudi Arabia, Jews in Israel—one religion can impose its rule over an entire nation. The United States has enjoyed enough diversity that no one faith ever viewed itself as becoming dominant for political pur-

*These solid Democrat states included the southern states of Texas, Oklahoma, Missouri, Tennessee, Kentucky, West Virginia, Virginia, North Carolina, and Florida.

poses. When the American Constitution was formed, each Protestant denomination viewed a constitutional prohibition on a state religion to be their best bet. Now with the addition through immigration of more Catholics and Jews, Muslims, and the homegrown faiths of Christian Scientists and Mormons, there are greater numbers of religious minorities who fear not the state embracing a competing faith, but one imposing secularism.

The “religious right” is best understood as a parents’ rights movement that fears state interference in the family just as small-businessmen fear regulatory burdens, and taxpayers fear the growing tax take and gun owners fear politicians calling for gun control. As a result, for each major religion, the more important that faith is to a person’s life, perhaps best measured outwardly by how frequently one goes to church, synagogue, or mosque, the more likely one is to be a Republican. The more devout, the more likely a family is to be part of the center-right Leave Us Alone Coalition.

The 16 percent of Americans who attend church more than once each week voted 64 percent for Bush. The 26 percent of Americans who say they attend church weekly voted 58 percent for Bush. The 14 percent of Americans who attend church monthly voted 50 percent for Bush. The 28 percent of Americans who attend church “a few times a year” voted 45 percent for Bush and the 15 percent of Americans who “never” attend church voted only 36 percent for Bush.⁸

Polling shows this to be true of Catholics, Protestants, and Jews.

In 2004, Protestants who attend church weekly voted 70 percent for Bush, those Protestants who attend less often voted 56 percent for Bush. (White, evangelical, born-again—“religious right”—Protestants voted 78 percent for Bush over Kerry while all Protestants voted 59 percent for Bush.)⁹

Catholics who attend mass weekly voted 56 percent for Bush, and those who attend mass less often voted 49 percent for Bush.¹⁰

Rabbi Shmuel Bloom, the executive vice president of the Orthodox grassroots group Agudath Israel of America, said in 2004, “Almost 70 percent of Orthodox Jews, compared to 23 percent Conservative, and 15 percent Reform Jews, cast their votes for President Bush.”¹¹

One way to understand why the “religious right” usually finds itself comfortable in the Leave Us Alone Coalition is to remember how it came into being. Groups like the Moral Majority and the Christian Coalition did not bring evangelicals into the Republican Party in response to the 1962 ban on prayer in public schools or even the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* Supreme Court decision striking down state laws restricting abortions. The “religious right” was first visible in politics in the late ’70s in response to threats from the Carter administration to withdraw the tax deductibility of contributions to Christian schools and to use the FCC’s “Fairness Doctrine” to close down Christian radio stations. These threats may have been exaggerated. (William Murray, the son of the late atheist Madalyn Murray O’Hair, argues that the fear that President Carter’s FCC was going to close down all Christian radio stations was close to a complete fabrication, but it reportedly generated more letters than the Vietnam War.) The sense of embattlement was real enough to move millions into politics.

One can get a better understanding of the “religious right” in America by examining the life and work of the man who truly brought it into being: Paul Weyrich.

Paul Weyrich was born in Racine, Wisconsin, where his father, a German immigrant, maintained the boiler at St. Mary’s Hospital and was a Robert Taft Republican. Paul became a devout Catholic like his father and was motivated in politics by his faith. As a young Republican from the wrong side of the tracks, he says, he was a curiosity to the “country clubbers” who ran the local party.

He was the news director of WAXO in Kenosha, Wisconsin, when the Supreme Court banned prayer in government schools. He reached out to a Protestant minister, a Catholic priest, and a rabbi in criticizing the decision. He expected support from the Wisconsin Republican chairman Claude Jasper but, he recalls, Jasper “just about bit my head off,” saying the party did not get involved in religious matters.

When Weyrich moved to Washington, D.C., he worked for Senator Gordon Allott of Colorado, but more important, he began to stitch together the various “wings” of the conservative movement into a coherent whole. He was present at the creation of the “religious right,”

the broad and ecumenical movement of evangelical Protestants and Roman Catholics. Weyrich explains, "What pushed the religious leaders into politics was not the ERA or abortion or other social issues. Rather it was Carter's attempt to regulate the Christian and parochial schools. This was the nexus between social conservatism and opposition to big government."¹²

The Christian right became politically engaged and organized in self-defense. It saw itself as besieged, under attack by the secular state. This point is often missed by some on the left who worry that it wishes to impose itself on others. It is also misunderstood by some self-appointed religious leaders who hope to march these Americans who organized themselves to be left alone out into offensive battle against various sinners.

These parents of faith will fight to control what is taught to their children in their schools. They will not cross the street to go after folks in San Francisco who behave oddly.

THE OWNERSHIP SOCIETY

The growing investor class, those Americans who now own stock directly, increasingly through 401(k)s, individual retirement accounts, and mutual funds, also wishes to be left alone. Investors do not want their wealth damaged by taxes, inflation, labor unions, trial lawyers, or government abuse of businesses in which they own stock.

The expansion of the investor class, from 20 percent of households in 1980 to 50 percent of households in 2006, has begun to make clearer the connection between costs imposed on businesses and "benefits" flowing from government for employees of larger firms as well as the self-employed and small businesses.¹³ What used to be taxes or regulatory burdens on "other people," "taxes on the big corporations" are now understood to be a government-forced withdrawal from every American's retirement savings: his or her 401(k) or individual retirement account.

How the growth of the investor class is changing American politics

can be seen in the example of Steven Schier, the Congdon Professor of Political Science at Carleton College, in Northfield, Minnesota, a professor for thirty years. In his youth he saw himself as a beneficiary of government programs. “Almost a client,” he says.

But unlike many professions, university workers have long had portable pensions since the creation of TIAA-CREF, which provides defined-contribution pensions like IRAs for a profession where scholars were expected to shift from one university employer to another with regularity. Industrial workers were expected to stay with one employer for their career. A century ago professors were understood to move frequently and to have the ability to understand investing for their retirement.

For years, Schier contributed 3 percent of his salary to his retirement fund while his employer, Carleton, invested 10 percent. Schier now adds another 10 percent from his salary each year into his 403b. So for thirty years now Schier has had at least 13 percent—and in recent years 23 percent—of his income saved in a portable pension. On average, every four to five years he has saved one year’s salary. With interest buildup he now has many times his salary in his retirement fund.

Schier is now a proud and prosperous member of the investor class. Quietly, year by year, he has transformed from someone who might see himself as dependent to a man of independent means. Every tax, every regulation, every frivolous lawsuit is a direct attack on his wealth, his accumulated earnings, and his retirement. This professor is a businessman and investor.

PUBLIC SERVANTS: THE POLICE AND THE MILITARY

The Leave Us Alone Coalition is not antigovernment. It simply wants properly limited government that plays a role in protecting the life, liberty, and property of citizens. This is why Republicans who oppose much of what the present federal, state, and local governments do

tend to support the military and police. When soldiers or the police have their guns pointed outward toward foreigners who truly wish us harm or criminals who would rob us, they are the protectors of our liberty. This is why studies have found that the military itself is heavily Republican, as are many police. During the Cold War, those Americans who were most focused on the threat from the Soviet Empire and those fearful of crime were charter members of the Leave Us Alone Coalition and strong supporters of those parts of the government that provided that protection for all of us.

To distinguish between government workers who are likely members of our coalition and those on the other team, there are two simple tests. If the government employee in question is doing a job whose job description can be found in the Constitution, he or she is a strong candidate for the Leave Us Alone Coalition. Second, if an American who works for the federal, state, or local government can look in the mirror and confidently say, "If my neighbors knew my pay, benefits, and pension, the hours I work, and vacation days I take, they would cross the street and thank me for doing my job," then he or she will be comfortable with us.

But if that government employee would be embarrassed to let his taxpayer neighbors know his true pay, pension, benefits, and hours worked—then he should put out yard signs for the Democrat Party.

Those government employees who spend their days protecting the rights and freedoms of all Americans equally are natural members of the Leave Us Alone Coalition. The armed forces have protected us from and defeated British imperialism, German National Socialism, Japanese imperialism, and Soviet communism and kept us free. Soldiers, sailors, airmen, marines, and the National Guard know that Republicans and conservatives value their service. And if they forget who their friends are, some on the left helpfully chime in calling them "baby killers" "imperialists," and "Fascists." They are reminded by Bill Clinton who wrote of his "loathing" of the military. And in a widely publicized defining moment, in the first week of the Clinton administration, Army Lieutenant General Barry McCaffrey, the as-

sistant to the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said “good morning” to a young aide in the White House, who responded, “I don’t talk to the military.”¹⁴

Bill Clinton strengthened the sense of hostility and indifference to those government workers who protect us when he had publicly antagonistic relationships with the leadership of the CIA and the FBI director William S. Sessions.

Just before the 2006 election John F. Kerry played to this sense of Democrat disdain for the American soldier with his “botched joke” that was viewed as suggesting that only the dimwitted with few career choices get stuck in Iraq.

Our men and women in the armed forces are not an insignificant voting bloc. As of December 31, 2006, there were 502,466 men and women in the army; 345,566 in the navy; 178,477 in the Marine Corps; 345,024 in the Air Force; and 40,829 in the Coast Guard.¹⁵ A recent study showed 75 percent of men and women in the army see themselves as Republicans.¹⁶

The police, prison guards, and much of the judicial system spend their time putting Democrats in prison for breaking into the houses of Republicans. They know their work protecting our lives and property is greatly appreciated by Republicans. And should the police feel insufficiently loved by the right, the left will push them away with national campaigns such as the one taking sides with the cop killer Mumia Abu-Jamal of Pennsylvania, who murdered police officer Daniel Faulkner. Cops tend to remember New York City Democrat Al Sharpton and Tawana Brawley. It was a while ago that the left gleefully referred to cops as “pigs,” but not so long ago that police now retired and their sons and daughters now serving have forgotten who hates them. Today there are roughly 800,720 state and local police and 448,610 corrections officers.¹⁷ It was the gun-rights movement that championed the legislation to allow police and retired police to carry their weapons across state lines so that every New York City policeman who lives in Connecticut or New Jersey does not commit a felony when he drives home with his service revolver.

THE WEDNESDAY MEETING

The Leave Us Alone Coalition appears in the flesh every Wednesday in Washington, D.C., when 120 center-right activists meet from 10 A.M. to 11:30 A.M. in the offices of Americans for Tax Reform. There, activists from taxpayer groups, business groups, property rights groups, the National Federation of Independent Businesses, the 60 Plus Association, Citizens Against Government Waste, the American Conservative Union, the National Rifle Association, Eagle Forum, homeschoolers, Protestants, Catholics, Orthodox Jews, Muslims, and Mormons meet. Between twenty and thirty forward-looking presentations are made by the participants on what they and their groups are doing. No one tells anyone else what to do. They let everyone else know what they are doing. This is not a meeting for whining or criticism. Presentations are short, only a few minutes long. A great deal of paper is handed out, so anyone with lots to say can write it up and make copies. Bloggers and writers are invited to join on an off-the-record basis.

There are now similar meetings in forty-five state capitals and ten in “second” cities such as New York, Los Angeles, San Diego, and Albuquerque. The state and city meetings generally meet weekly when the legislature is in session and monthly when the legislature is out of session. All those who attend the state meetings are welcome to join and speak to the meeting in Washington when they pass through our imperial city. Over the years dozens of foreign guests have joined the meeting and have returned to their home countries and established Leave Us Alone Coalition meetings in a growing number of cities that now include Tokyo, London, Rome, Ottawa, and Brussels.

The stateside meetings are a physical representation of how the Leave Us Alone Coalition works to build and organize the center-right in America.

As I have mentioned, the groups and the movements they represent do not agree on everything. They do not agree on some ten-point manifesto. There is no statement of purpose. No votes are taken. They are all active because on their primary vote-moving issue they wish to

be left alone and they recognize that—however benighted the other attendees of the Wednesday meeting or the conservative movement may be on a host of issues—they are not in conflict on their primary issues.

And so, if for one and a half hours each Wednesday the Christians can agree not to raise anyone's taxes, and the property rights activists can agree not to steal anyone's guns and the gun owners can refrain from throwing prophylactics at the Christians' kids—that is, if everyone can agree to keep out of the faces and pockets of everyone else in the room—then we can go forth and annoy the left for the rest of the week. This is a low-maintenance coalition. No one wants anything at the expense of anyone else on a primary issue.

AND VS. OR: BUILDING A MOVEMENT

Perhaps the best way to understand how the Leave Us Alone Coalition works is through the serious lesson of a joke I first heard on the old Ed Sullivan TV show. It was about a businessman who had purchased fire and theft insurance for twenty years from his local insurance agent. One day his business burned to the ground and he went to his friend to collect his insurance money. The agent looked at the contract and up at his friend and back at the contract and said, "Oh, you should have had our fire *or* theft insurance."

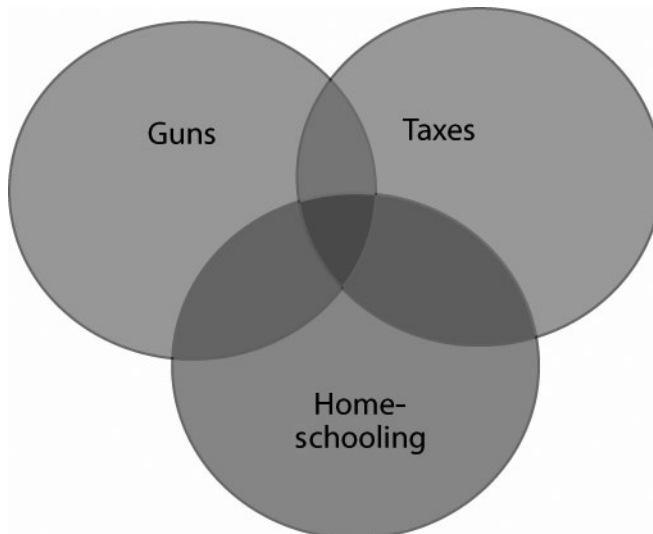
In politics there is a great deal of difference between "*and*" and "*or*." The Venn diagram on the following page shows three circles. One represents all voters who vote on the gun issue as their primary vote-moving issue. The second circle represents those voters who cast their vote on the tax issue and the third circle is those voters who vote on a desire to be able to homeschool their children without government harassment. Now there are in real life as many circles as there are primary vote-moving issues. But for purposes of understanding the key distinction between "*and*" and "*or*" in politics, note that the deeply shaded area in the middle is that collection of voters who are protaxpayer, progun, *and* prohomeschooling. That is a very small zone compared to the larger area composed of those who are progun

or protaxpayer *or* prohomeschooler. And the difference between “and” and “or” grows with the addition of other vote-moving issues: property rights, respect for one’s faith and ability to pass it on to one’s child, the investor class, etc. Each additional issue makes the “or” zone larger and the “and” zone smaller.

Now if you are planning to achieve political power by seizing the radio stations and the airports, you might be able to operate only with supporters in the “and” zone, but if you wish to win democratic elections with at least 51 percent of the vote it is easier if you are winning support from the larger “or” zone.

Phyllis Schlafly commented back in 1980 that she urged everyone to vote for the candidate of her choice for their own reason. It was not necessary for everyone to vote for Reagan in 1980 for the same reason. There were perhaps twenty reasons. And whichever one moved your vote was a fine and dandy reason. Political activists must resist the temptation to expect or demand that voters they speak with support their candidate for their reason.

When I was younger I would approach voters in 1980 and urge them to vote for Reagan because he was for lower taxes. When the



voter agreed, I would also urge them to vote for Reagan because he was good on guns. And I would proceed to go to other issues until I hit one the voter objected to.

One fish. One hook. It is not necessary or likely or even desirable to have a voter agree with your ten reasons for a correct vote. Once you have made the sale it is a waste of time to go on about other issues.

THE COALITION HOLDS

From time to time, political pundits of the right and left point out some rip-roaring conflict within the Republican base and proceed to predict for the seventeenth time that the Reagan coalition will break into two or three pieces.

These predictions began back in 1980 when the *New York Times* noticed that people who go to church and people with jobs were both supporting Reagan. Surely they would soon be at each other's throats. They missed the fact that some folks both go to church and have jobs but more important, even if there were no overlap, each part of the coalition was there for its own reason independent of any other part of the coalition.

Yes, there are disagreements among members of the Leave Us Alone Coalition on many issues. Listen to talk radio. But the key question is always: Is this a conflict among coalition members on a primary vote-moving issue? Or it is a conflict on secondary, tertiary, or quaternary issues? (Or whatever fifth is?)

Pat Buchanan made just this error in his campaign in 1996 for the Republican nomination for the presidency. He correctly pointed out that polling of Republicans showed that 70 percent thought there were too many immigrants and 70 percent were skeptics of free trade with China.¹⁸ Therefore he would run on these issues for the Republican nomination and win 70 percent of the vote.¹⁹ But when he ran he never got more than 34 percent of any state's vote and won only 21 percent of the Republican primary vote. He tested his hypothesis again in 2000, avoiding the Republican primaries and running on the

Reform Party ticket, and won only 0.42 percent of the popular vote in the general election.²⁰

When the Buchanan campaign pollsters asked what Republicans thought of immigration and trade with China they forgot to ask the second—and only important—question: And do you vote on this issue? As a member of the board of directors of the National Rifle Association, I can assure you that many NRA members have what I consider the oddest views on free trade with China. But they vote on guns.

I once had a lively conversation with a Palestinian American for fifteen minutes on his thoughts on who should run Hebron. At the end of the conversation he explained that he was a dues-paying member of the NRA and always voted guns. People often talk about subjects they don't vote on. Talk-show hosts get rich focusing on what Americans like to talk about and listen to. Political parties, candidates, and political movements live or die by focusing like a laser on those issues that move votes, not those that wag tongues.

Conversations, loud and boisterous, over secondary issues do not threaten the coalition. It is simply a reminder that if you intend to be the majority party in a nation of three hundred million souls there is not going to be unanimity. Political leaders manage such conflict, they do not eliminate it. If you want a political party where every member agrees on all major political issues of the day, then you have one of those Trotskyite parties in Britain with seven members. Fine size for a discussion group. Not a contender for power.

A CENTER-RIGHT SUPERMAJORITY

And 51 percent is not enough. A governing majority movement must earn and deserve 60 percent of the vote in order to ensure winning 51 percent of votes counted. Why the large margin for error? Because there will always be candidates who forget to mention DUIs until the last weekend of an election; voter fraud; and handsome, competent

candidates on the other side who “steal” the votes of those who agree with you on the issues but are voting for incumbency, personal friendship, or a regional favorite.

You also need to earn 60 percent of the vote because a simple majority in the House and Senate is not enough to govern. You must have sixty votes in the Senate to override a filibuster and enough votes to maintain majorities in the House for specific legislation, not simply leadership elections.

I describe Reagan Republicanism as both center-right and the Leave Us Alone Coalition. Why? The phrase “center-right” is not a sign that I am getting squishy in my old age. Rather it correctly captures two ideas. One, that the Reagan center-right movement is a majoritarian movement. It is no longer a fringe movement of the right, a once-minority faction of the then-minority Republican Party. It encompasses a majority. I would argue that the center-right policies and candidates are supported by about 60 percent of voters when we present our policies clearly with a competent candidate and campaign: Reagan in 1984, Bush and Perot against Clinton in 1992. And center-right conveys that our policies cover both the right in American politics and much of the middle. In 1974–1978, when I was an undergraduate at Harvard, I believed that the Soviet Union was both evil and an empire. I believed socialism was a failed economic system that led to poverty and lack of political freedom. I believed that inflation was caused by the federal government printing too much money. I believed that murderers deserved to be executed. I argued that high taxes slowed the economy and that welfare hurt the very people it was supposed to help. In the 1970s, that made me a right-winger. Today I could walk through Harvard Yard shouting these observations and be met with yawns from students saying, “Tell us something we don’t know.”

Over the years, Reagan Republicanism did not moderate. We did not “move to the middle.” The country saw the failure of the united Democrat government under Lyndon Johnson and Jimmy Carter and the contrasting success of Reagan’s policies. Tax cuts led to economic

growth. The government stopped inflating the currency. The Soviet Union was defeated; socialism, the idea and practice, collapsed. Welfare reform first advocated by Reagan in 1971 was passed in the 1990s over Clinton's double veto and it worked. The failure of the left and the success of the center-right moved the nation toward us. Those once standing on the right were now standing dead center.

TESTING THE THEORY AGAINST REALITY

Visualizing the framework of the Leave Us Alone Coalition allows one to understand what the Republican Party will do in its own self-interest, and what it cannot do and maintain its strength. The true test of a theory is whether it can explain the past and predict the future. Seeing the conservative movement and the Reagan Republican Party as animated by a broad coalition of groups and individuals that each wishes on its primary vote-moving issue to be left alone does that. A competent Republican leader will work to increase in number each of the moving parts of the Leave Us Alone Coalition. He or she will work to increase the number of self-employed, the number of gun owners, the number of homeschoolers, and the sensitivity of taxpayers to the tax burden by making it more transparent. He or she will never raise taxes; push gun control; attack private property, private schools, or homeschooling; raise taxes or regulations on small business or the self-employed; or insult people of faith.

The Leave Us Alone construct also informs political candidates. Candidates need to find and focus on the primary, vote-moving issue that attracts a voter. Each voter does not need four reasons to vote for you. One strong one will do. One fish, one hook.

Ronald Reagan in 1980 and George W. Bush in 2000 both stood in the center of the Leave Us Alone Coalition and spoke directly to each of its moving parts, assuring them that they would be left alone in the zone most important to them. George H. W. Bush made those commitments in 1988 and defeated serious primary and general elec-

tion opponents. When Bush 41 broke his commitment to many of the members of the Leave Us Alone Coalition by supporting gun control, raising taxes in order to expand domestic spending, and enacting massive new regulatory regimes on business with the Clean Air Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act, he threw away the presidency he had inherited. Like a high school student bequeathed an expensive car, he had no idea how to maintain it. Bush's humiliating defeat in 1992 followed a presidency that successfully managed the collapse of the Soviet Union without a great deal of blood on the floor. Bush organized the entire world to push Saddam Hussein's Iraq out of Kuwait and did not get stuck occupying the place. Bush had achieved approval ratings as high as 90 percent. But there was a hole in the bottom of the boat—his tax hike and regulatory spree—and he lost to the “failed governor of a small state,” Bill Clinton. But this presidential defeat was caused by Bush's mistreatment of the center-right, not the weakening of the coalition itself.

The coalition was still there. Add the Bush and Perot vote in 1992 and you have 57 percent of the vote. Clinton, representing the left, won only 43 percent of the vote in 1992. Many of Clinton's subsequent errors flowed from his believing the rhetoric of his supporters that his minority vote represented a “mandate” for the left's agenda. He ran promising change. America *did* want to change the government that under George H. W. Bush was raising taxes to spend more money and exploding the regulatory state. But Clinton did not want to change the government. He wanted to use the state to change America.

Time and *Newsweek* betrayed him by proclaiming that there was a national mandate for using the power of the state to change America into a social democracy through nationalizing 15 percent of the economy—doctors, hospitals, and health insurance.

Anyone who missed the creation and growth of the Leave Us Alone Coalition in the elections of 1980 through 1988 certainly got the message loud and clear in 1994. The Clinton administration threatened every single part of the Leave Us Alone Coalition in 1993 and 1994.

They passed the Brady bill and the assault-weapons ban threatening gun owners with future gun control. They raised taxes. On gasoline. On incomes. On Social Security benefits. Targeting small-businessmen and -women. Legislation was introduced that could lead to federal government control of homeschooling. They mistreated the military, politicizing appointments, playing social engineer with gays in the military, and moving toward allowing women in combat. They tried to nationalize all health care.

Every part of the coalition knew it could wake up any morning and read that the Democrat Congress and the Democrat president had agreed to pass legislation that attacked their central vote-moving concern. Republican House leaders Newt Gingrich and Dick Armey (R-TX) drafted a ten-point "Contract with America" that read like the list of grievances in the Declaration of Independence, reaching out to every threatened group in the country. And Americans responded with vigor.

On Election Day, November 8, 1994, nine million more Republicans went to the polls than did so in the previous off-year election of 1990. Republicans captured the House and Senate, gaining fifty-eight House Seats and nine Senate seats. They gained 10 governors and 505 state legislators.

In 1996, Republicans nominated a pre-Reagan presidential candidate, Bob Dole, who liked to tell the story of how he chose to run for local office as a Republican. He explained that when he learned there were more Republican than Democrat voters in his county he chose to be a Republican. Dole had distinguished himself as an opponent of supply-side tax reduction. He did not have an ideological bone in his body. He did not understand the nature of the modern Reagan Republican Party. In addition to the weakness at the top of the ticket, the Leave Us Alone Coalition victory in the 1994 congressional races meant that a Clinton presidency did not threaten many of its key issues. Congress would stop tax hikes, gun control, and new entitlement spending; regulations of private schools or homeschooling; overspending; and Clinton himself claimed to be chastened, saying

in his 1996 State of the Union Address that he believed “the era of big government is over.” A less threatened Leave Us Alone Coalition did not turn out with the urgency or numbers that it did in 1994. Still, it was enough to keep the House and Senate.

In 1998, Republicans ran a nationalized campaign, not on a Contract with America to protect the Leave Us Alone Coalition, but one to punish Clinton the adulterer. Republicans expected to gain seats in the House and instead lost five seats. Those who believe the Leave Us Alone Coalition is really a thinly veiled collection of Savonarolas might ponder that 1998 election that could not translate the widespread and real personal moral revulsion of how the president of the United States treated women into actual votes for actual congressmen.

In 2000, George W. Bush stood in the dead center of the Leave Us Alone Coalition and defeated a popular war hero, John McCain, who stood slightly off center due to his support for restrictions on political speech—campaign finance reform. And in November, in a time of peace and strong economic growth and up against a sitting vice president who had been training and preparing for this campaign all his life, was able to win an electoral vote majority despite the hiccup of the late-breaking DUI.

In 2002 and 2004, Bush ran as the champion of the Leave Us Alone Coalition, adding a defense against international terrorism to his quiver.

By 2006, the occupation of Iraq went from being seen as part of the war on terror designed to protect all Americans to an unending social-engineering experiment. The campaign was nationalized as a referendum on what was seen as Bush’s vision of an occupation of Iraq without end. The Republicans were not campaigning for new or larger tax hikes. (They did call for extending the 2001 and 2003 tax cuts already in place, but this is the equivalent of turning in last week’s homework a second time.) A number of personal scandals cost Republicans maybe six or eight seats in the House and two in the Senate.

In 2006, Republicans talked about their past accomplishments of

cutting taxes six times in six years. They wanted a thank-you vote. But Americans do not cast their votes to say thank you. Every election is about the future and there was no articulated argument “Vote Republican and we will do the following.” No contract with America. With one exception: Vote Republican and we will be occupying some country called Iraq indefinitely.

Nor could the Leave Us Alone Coalition be rallied against the threat of a Democrat Congress. Most Democrats ran promising not to raise taxes. Forty ran with the endorsement of the NRA, swearing fealty to the Second Amendment.²¹ A number of tragic school-shooting incidents in the summer and fall of 2006 could not coax Democrats into calling for gun control. Some Republicans talked about how left-wing Nancy Pelosi or Charlie Rangel was. But few Americans knew who they were. (The Democrats couldn’t campaign against Newt Gingrich in 1994. He wasn’t famous yet.) Highlighting Pelosi is a strategy that may pay dividends in 2008 or 2010.

Had Democrats won House and Senate seats promising to spend more, raise taxes, steal your guns, and impose secular values on your children, then the Leave Us Alone Coalition would have been shown to have turned out a minority vote. That is not what happened in 2006.

The Leave Us Alone Coalition structure of the modern center-right has held together. It explains both election successes and failures over the past twenty-five years. And understanding the coalition will allow us to see what might happen in the next twenty-five years.

Many on the left violently object to the idea that the center-right is a coalition of groups and individuals who vote together for the same candidates because on the issue that moves their vote what they want is to be left alone. Conservatives, they argue, or at least the religious conservatives, want to legislate morality. They want to tell other folks how to run their lives. They ask, “How in the world can a movement that includes a strong right-to-life component be said to be a Leave Us Alone Coalition? Pro-lifers who oppose legalized abortion are not leaving us alone.”

WHAT ABOUT THE ABORTION ISSUE?

This is an adult question and its answer deepens one's understanding of the modern Republican Party beyond name-calling. There are in the Republican Party and the conservative movement both those who are pro-life and pro-choice on the issue of abortion. The key question driving the pro- and anti-legalized-abortion position for conservatives is "how many people are involved here?" If in the case of a pregnant woman, there is a mother and a baby, then there are two lives at stake and both deserve to be left alone. Both deserve to have their right to life protected. If, however, one believes that there is only one person involved, the woman, then the state has no legitimate interest in telling her what to do.

I do not know any conservatives who believe there are two persons involved in a pregnancy and it is okay to kill one of them. Nor do I know any conservative who believes that the woman is the only person involved and the state should force her to bear a child.

This allows both pro-lifers and pro-choicers to see themselves as wanting only to be Left Alone, and given their underlying beliefs, they are both right. The left and the Democrats make this a more divisive issue by not simply arguing for the legalization of abortion, but going further to demand that taxpayers be required to fund the abortions of others and that all health insurance include paying for abortions so that those morally opposed to abortion must fund the abortions of others. Those claiming to be "pro-choice" on abortion do not offer choice to those whose religious beliefs oppose financing abortions. The left further demands that parents should not have the right to even be informed if their daughter has an abortion. This is understandably seen as an attack on the family and parental rights.

The key political question here is whether this issue is the one that drives your vote. There are many Republicans who are personally pro-choice. They may wish the Republican Party were pro-choice. Some testify at GOP national conventions and have formed a national group called Republicans for Choice, led by Ann Stone. But by definition, if

they have been voting Republican since *Roe v. Wade* in 1973, their vote and therefore their party identification are driven by an issue other than abortion. They may vote on taxes or guns, or national defense or crime.

AND GAY RIGHTS?

Okay, what about gay rights? How can “gay bashing” conservatives be seen as “Leave Us Alone”?

Again, a serious question that deserves and requires a grown-up response. Republicans running for Congress win about one-quarter of the gay vote. Not only do many gays vote Republican, but there are gay Republicans who organize politically as gays. The Log Cabin Republicans are a national Republican group with over fifty state and local chapters with 20,000 members who are Republicans who are also gay.²²

The Pink Pistols are a nationwide organization of gays who understand that gay bashing is less of a problem when gays own and know how to use guns. There are forty-eight Pink Pistol chapters.²³ One of the most memorable groups among the eighty-something organizations that combined in 1994 to defeat then-Speaker of the House Thomas Foley, who despite “representing” a rural Washington State district had supported gun control legislation, was “Queers with Guns.” Concise. To the point. Descriptive.

It was the Republican Party that passed pension-reform legislation in 2006 that will allow gay couples to pass on defined-contribution pensions such as 401(k)s not just to spouses but to anyone they choose. It is the Republican Congress that has repeatedly voted to abolish the inheritance tax—a change that would particularly help gay couples. Rhetoric aside, the Democrats treat gays as they treat blacks, asking them to subsist on rhetoric while the Democrat Party continues to tax them and their lives on behalf of the paying clients—the labor unions, trial lawyers, and government employees.

So how do the Republicans win a quarter of the gay vote? Gay

Americans who simply want to be left alone recognize that the modern center-right movement has no agenda to outlaw homosexuality or use the power of the state to tax or attack gays as gays. Gay Americans who are also homeowners, businessmen, shareholders, gun owners or men and women of faith will find the modern left ready, willing and able to tax, regulate and attack them—not as gays—but as income earners, property owners, gun owners, etc.

And some gay political organizations go beyond wanting to be left alone to demanding that the government fund their organizations and arguing that the state should police speech they don't like.

But don't some religious conservatives argue that homosexuality is against the Bible? Yes. Everyone is free to believe and argue for what they believe—on their own time and their own dime. Even people you disagree with.

Being a charter member of the Leave Us Alone Coalition does not mean everyone else in the coalition agrees with you or even respects your choices or values. (Even though, in your case, of course, they should.) If you want everyone to like you, approve of you, or believe as you do—advocate for free love, believing Baptist or Cubs fan—you are free to go be a missionary for your views, spending your own money. The line is drawn at using the state and its power to force others to subsidize your views or to demand that they agree with you. In the bad old days the state would force you to attend the king's favorite church and believe as he did. That was wrong. It is also wrong when some groups want the government to use laws or the schools to tell others what to think or say. As we learned in grade school, there is no law requiring that others like us. Nor should there be.

The Leave Us Alone Coalition represents a majority of Americans. It holds together because while members vote on different issues, and hold often wildly conflicting views on secondary issues, they are not in conflict on their primary, vote-moving issues. They vote for candidates and parties that work to limit the size, scope, and cost of government to where the state protects the lives and property of its citizens and calls it a day.