

The Power of a Long-term Vision Statement to Change the Direction of Our Country

A Comparison Between How Conservatives and Progressives Communicate

Summary

How did conservatives successfully define good government as limited government, fiscal responsibility as less government, and the common good as the private sector? The answer lies in the conservative movement's ability to communicate their values and vision.

The author explores the impact of a long-term vision statement, and the lack of one, on the ability of conservatives and progressives to effectively communicate. The criteria for writing a vision statement is presented, as well as a proposed progressive vision statement, "*We Are Progressives*." It is then compared to the conservative vision statement, "*Republican Principles*," in a side by side format.

The lesson to be learned from the rise of conservatism is that a "clearly defined and consistent philosophy" is important to the success of a political movement.

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I. A vision statement unites and positively motivates people to work together for a common cause

A vision statement is an expression of a political movement’s values and how those values relate to one another. A vision statement defines good government.

| <p>“We Are Progressives” (193 words) A proposed progressive vision statement</p> | <p>“Republican Principles” (205 words) The conservative vision statement</p> |
|---|---|
| <p>We believe America’s promise of security, prosperity, and liberty belongs to all Americans.</p> <p>Comprehensive National Security</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We believe leadership with global cooperation is the best way to secure peace. • We believe the power of the United States and our military might must be used honestly and wisely. • We believe acting on environmental challenges strengthens our nation and protects the Earth. <p>Building Prosperity Today and for Future Generations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We believe responsibility, honesty, and compassion are fundamental to a successful nation. • We believe prosperity begins with every American’s right to be healthy, educated, and to live in a safe community and a clean environment. • We believe a vibrant economy is built with American jobs, well-paid productive workers, innovation, and the entrepreneurial spirit. • We believe efficient government, effective public investments, and fiscal responsibility serve our citizens best. <p>Protecting Personal Liberty</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We believe in the values of freedom, fairness, and respect. • We believe all citizens have the right to enjoy their full civil liberties with equal access to opportunity and justice. • We believe the cornerstone of democracy is honest elections with transparent government. <p>Finally, we believe our nation’s strength lies in a shared commitment to these ideals.</p> | <p>I am a Republican because...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I believe the strength of our nation lies with the individual and that each person’s dignity, freedom, ability and responsibility must be honored. • I believe in equal rights, equal justice and equal opportunity for all, regardless of race, creed, sex, age or disability. • I believe free enterprise and encouraging individual initiative have brought this nation opportunity, economic growth and prosperity. • I believe government must practice fiscal responsibility and allow individuals to keep more of the money they earn. • I believe the proper role of government is to provide for the people only those critical functions that cannot be performed by individuals or private organizations and that the best government is that which governs least. • I believe the most effective, responsible and responsive government is government closest to the people. • I believe Americans must retain the principles that have made us strong while developing new and innovative ideas to meet the challenges of changing times. • I believe Americans value and should preserve our national strength and pride while working to extend peace, freedom and human rights throughout the world. <p>Finally, I believe that the Republican Party is the best vehicle for translating these ideals into positive and successful principles of government.</p> |

II. A consistent conservative message helped to reverse the tide of progressivism in the U.S.

In the first half of the 20th century, good government was expected to curb corporate power, end political corruption, breakup business monopolies, democratize electoral procedures, stand up for working people, protect the environment, bridge the prosperity gap between communities, and expand social justice. Good government was seen as a catalyst to increase personal liberty and enable all citizens to reach their fullest potential.

Yet in 1981, Americans whole heartily embraced the conservative view of government with the election of President Ronald Reagan. Government is no longer viewed as a catalyst, but as an impediment to personal liberty and economic freedom. President Reagan signaled this dramatic reversal during his inaugural speech when he proclaimed, "...government is not the solution to our problem; government is the problem."¹

How did the conservative movement successfully redefine good government as limited government, fiscal responsibility as less government, and the common good as the private sector? The answer is found in the ability to effectively communicate values and how they relate to a larger vision.

The success of the conservative movement can be traced through the development of a clear and consistent message

Conservatives were not always united, much less in possession of a clear, consistent message. It wasn't until 1962 that the conservative message gained form with the publication of In Defense of Freedom by Frank S. Meyer, editor of the National Review (magazine). Meyer's aim was to reconcile the philosophical differences between the various conservative fractions. His work led to a conservative consensus called fusionism; prominent fusionists include Senator Barry Goldwater and President Ronald Reagan.

It should be noted that while conservatives were in the process of clarifying their political philosophy, the opposite was taking place for non-conservatives. According to historian Fred Siegal, "Liberals were vulnerable on the "values" issues precisely because it was no longer clear what they were asking individuals to do for their country, for their community, or even for themselves – except to pay taxes."²

In 1994, the Republican Party regained the House of Representatives for the first time in forty years, regained control of the Senate, plus had more than 30 governorships representing 70% of the population. Edwards and Gottfried attribute the rise of conservatism in the 1980s and 1990s as a time when the conservative movement "...contained all the elements necessary for political success: a clearly defined, consistent philosophy; a broad-based, cohesive national constituency; experienced, charismatic, principled leadership; a sound financial base; and proficiency in the mass media."³

Dan Schnur, former national communications director for Senator McCain's 2000 presidential bid, said it best during a panel discussion entitled *How and Why Republicans Win* – "We tell people what we stand for."⁴

"Republican Principles" enables conservatives to effectively communicate their values

"*Republican Principles*" is a brief, positive statement of conservative values and how those values relate to a larger vision. It answers the question, "where do we want to go?" It serves to unite

and positively motivate conservatives to work together for a common cause. It defines good government. *“Republican Principles”* is a powerful resource used to communicate within the conservative movement and with the public at large.

“Republican Principles”, also referred to as the “Republican Oath,” is found on numerous conservative web sites including that of the Republican National Committee.⁵ An Internet search using “Republican Oath” or “Republican Principles” yields the same 8-point vision statement. Conservatives have repeated, paraphrased, and referred to the values listed in *“Republican Principles”* with such steadfast consistency that the main tenets of the conservative philosophy are well know to most Americans regardless of political affiliation.

III. Comparing how conservatives and progressives communicate with and without a vision statement

“Republican Principles” is a sophisticated communication resource that unites the conservative movement in many, sometimes subtle, ways. The chart below offers a number of ways conservatives have benefited from a vision statement and how progressives have been hampered by the lack of one.

| With a conservative vision statement | Without a progressive vision statement |
|--|---|
| <i>“Republican Principles”</i> enables conservatives to define conservatism. | The absence of a progressive vision statement allows conservatives to define progressivism. |
| <i>“Republican Principles”</i> effectively frames the concept of good government. For example, good government is fiscally responsible. Fiscally responsible is defined as less government spending and lower taxes. Thus, conservatives have not only framed “fiscally responsible,” they have also framed “good government.” | Progressives frame individual issues with an intense focus on words. It is unclear to the general public how progressives view the role of government. |
| <i>“Republican Principles”</i> provides structure for what otherwise would be a list of disconnected values. Conservative values add up to a conservative vision. A vision answers the question, “where do we want to go?” | Progressives have not been able to connect their values to a larger vision. Progressives values do not have a clear connection to each other. Without the ability to convey a clear vision, progressives have a difficult time projecting leadership. |
| <i>“Republican Principles”</i> unites conservatives, informs citizens, and positively motivates voters. | Progressive organizations do not have a clear connection to each other beyond their opposition to conservatives. |

| With a conservative vision statement | Without a progressive vision statement |
|--|--|
| <p><i>“Republican Principles” offers continuity between issue-specific campaigns.</i> For example, the conservative rationale for privatizing health care and public education is the same: the private sector can be depended upon to be innovative and more cost-effective. Government is an impediment to progress.</p> | <p>Progressives roll out new messages and new agendas without the benefit of an over-arching vision. Confused by multiple messages, many voters are not quite sure what progressives stand for, where they want to lead the nation, or how they view the role of government.</p> |
| <p><i>“Republican Principles” provides context for conservative candidates.</i> Although a vision statement doesn’t dictate what a candidate should say or not say, it does help voters to key into the conservative candidate’s message.</p> | <p>The task of defining the progressive vision falls to the candidate. The progressive candidate must convey a bewildering amount of information in the short period of time an election is front and center in the minds of voters. Voters sometimes have a difficult time keying into the candidate’s message. This is especially true at the local and state level.</p> |
| <p><i>“Republican Principles” is a flexible resource used to communicate values.</i> It can be used in its entirety or in part, either word for word, or reworded to fit the need. For example, <i>“Republican Principles”</i> appears in the form of talking points on the House Republican Policy Committee web site to justify their stances on a given policy.⁶</p> | <p>Progressive organizations do not have a comparable communication resource to communicate their values. For example, the web site of the Democratic Caucus of the U.S. House of Representatives does not refer to values, but instead offers links to negative articles about Republicans.⁷</p> |

Conservatives communicate in context of a well known conservative vision, while progressives present issues in a problem-solution formula

Conservatives are successful in communicating their values while progressives are often criticized for being too policy oriented.

Conservatives present their values in the context of the vision statement, *“Republican Principles,”* using a three-step formula: state the problem, state the solution, connect to the larger vision. Progressives communicate in a problem-solution format without the benefit of a vision statement.

The examples on the next page are taken from conservative and progressive web sites. The issue is affordable health insurance. It is interesting to note that although progressive organizations may differ in their solutions, they communicate in the same problem-solution formula. Please note: the conservative values are underlined and the text in parenthesis has been added for emphasis.

Chart to follow.

Conservative three-step formula

From the Web Site of The Heritage Foundation⁸

(Problem) Most American businesses operate in something closely resembling a free market: Consumers are free to pick and choose goods and services. Thus, consumers have the ultimate say about what succeeds and what fails in sectors such as cars; fashion; music; restaurants; and financial services; as well as in other areas of insurance, such as auto, life, and homeowners insurance. Yet, this fundamental principle is absent from the health insurance market ...

(Solution) The conservative alternative to “socialized medicine” is giving individuals and families the freedom to choose the health care that they trust. Policymakers at both the federal and the state level have many options for restoring freedom of choice to the private health insurance system. Citizens have a critical role to play by becoming informed and pressuring lawmakers to remove the regulations and policies that restrict personal choice.

“Republican Principles” Referenced

- I believe the proper role of government is to provide for the people only those critical functions that cannot be performed by individuals or private organizations and that the best government is that which governs least.
- I believe the strength of our nation lies with the individual and that each person’s dignity, freedom, ability and responsibility must be honored.

From the Web Site of The Republican National Committee⁹

(Problem) Americans are fortunate to have the most advanced and innovative health care system in the world. The President’s plan will make private health insurance more affordable and increase the number of Americans with health insurance.

(Solution) The plan will also help our Nation move away from reliance on government-run health care and toward a system in which Americans have better access to basic, affordable private insurance, and increased ownership of their medical decisions.

“Republican Principles” Referenced

- I believe the proper role of government is to provide for the people only those critical functions that cannot be performed by individuals or private organizations and that the best government is that which governs least.
- I believe free enterprise and encouraging individual initiative have brought this nation opportunity, economic growth and prosperity.

Progressive problem-solution formula

From the Web Site of Campaign for America’s Future¹⁰

(Problem)Most Americans now feel our health care system is dysfunctional. We spend more money on health care than any other country, but our health outcomes are way below where they should be. People with health insurance are increasingly worried that their premiums and co-pays are claiming more of their income

– or that they will lose coverage altogether if their employment changes. 47 million Americans remain uninsured and millions of families are plunged into bankruptcy when serious illness strikes.

(Solution) Everyone in America deserves high quality, affordable health insurance.

None

From the Web Site of The Democratic National Committee¹¹

(Problem)In the wealthiest, most powerful nation on earth, no one should have to choose between taking their child to a doctor and paying the rent.

(Solution)We will join 36 other industrialized nations in making sure everyone has access to affordable health care, starting by fixing the prescription drug program and investing in stem cell research...

None

Compare the three versions below as progressive values are increasingly clarified with the use of a vision statement

Below is an example of how a vision statement would enable progressives to communicate in a three-step formula: state the problem, state the solution, connect to the larger vision. Again, text is from the web site of Campaign for America’s Future.

| | |
|--|---|
| PROBLEM | |
| Most Americans now feel our health care system is dysfunctional. We spend more money on health care than any other country, but our health outcomes are way below where they should be. People with health insurance are increasingly worried that their premiums and co-pays are claiming more of their income – or that they will lose coverage altogether if their employment changes. 47 million Americans remain uninsured and millions of families are plunged into bankruptcy when serious illness strikes. | |
| CURRENT SOLUTION FROM WEB SITE | > COMMENTS |
| Everyone in America deserves high quality, affordable health insurance. | High quality, affordable health insurance is a solution, not a value. |
| SOLUTION, MODIFIED | > COMMENTS |
| <u>Every American deserves to be healthy.</u> That’s why we believe everyone in America deserves high quality, affordable health insurance. | Healthy Americans is a value. What is the connection to the larger vision? |
| SOLUTION, THREE-STEP FORMULA | > COMMENTS |
| We believe everyone in American deserves high quality, affordable health insurance because a <u>healthy nation is a prosperous and strong nation.</u> | This version demonstrates the power of a vision statement to connect values for the purpose of communicating a larger vision. Here, the issue of affordable health insurance becomes an issue of national prosperity and strength. |
| PROGRESSIVE VISION STATEMENT REFERENCED | > COMMENTS |
| We believe <u>prosperity</u> begins with every <u>American’s right to be healthy</u> , educated, and to live in a safe community and a clean environment. We believe <u>America’s promise</u> of security, <u>prosperity</u> , and liberty belongs to <u>all</u> Americans. Finally, we believe our <u>nation’s strength</u> lies in a shared commitment to these ideals. | The effectiveness of this statement depends on two factors: (1) the degree to which a vision statement is used to communicate values (2) the degree to which progressive values are known and understood by the general public. |

IV. Developing an effective progressive vision statement requires five steps

1. Define progressive values.

A number of important studies have identified what values progressives have in common. The Progressive Majority: Why a Conservative America Is a Myth, a report compiled by Campaign for America’s Future and Media Matters for America, shows “...that in study after study, solid majorities of Americans take progressive stands on a full spectrum of issues, from bread-and-butter economics to the so-called “values” issues where conservatives claim preeminence.”¹²

2. Define good government.

The definition of good government is central to the differences between progressives and conservatives. John Halpin, senior advisor at the Center for American Progress, defines

progressivism as “a non-ideological, pragmatic system of thought grounded in solving problems and maintaining strong values within society.”¹³ Add to Halpin’s definition – good government serves as a catalyst to promote conditions that increase personal liberty and enables all citizens to reach their fullest potential.

3. Make the connection between progressive values and the larger vision.

Individual values take on larger meaning when the connection to a positive vision is made.

For example:

- Addressing environmental challenges leads to healthy people, a strong economy, national security.
- Healthy, educated, well-paid, productive Americans and a vibrant economy go hand-in-hand.

4. Take control of the language.

It is now understood, thanks to George Lakoff and others, that conservatives control the language of civil debate by presenting fundamental concepts in conservative frames. In order to have the important debates in progressive terms, new frames are required. This can be accomplished by asking new questions. For example, what is the purpose of health insurance? (To gain access to health care.) What is the purpose of health care? (To secure health.) Therefore, the ultimate goal is health and “healthy Americans” is the value.

What do words really mean? The words and phrases progressives have relied on for decades to shorthand values don’t have the same impact as they once did. For example, diversity and inclusion are examples of progressive words dulled by conservative use. What does it mean to be a diverse society? In the proposed progressive vision statement, “We Are Progressives,” diversity and inclusion are expressed with the phrase all Americans. A diverse, inclusive society has respect for all communities.

Progressives often use the word sacrifice, which leads to a number of questions including who is to sacrifice what? Progressives could clarify this by calling instead for a shared commitment to progressive values and to our country.

Another example of a word in need of clarification is prosperity which is often used interchangeably with opportunity. Is opportunity the end goal? Or is the goal to be prosperous? What are the basic hallmarks of a prosperous people? The answer can be found by asking parents what they value for their children – to be healthy and educated, to live in a safe community and a clean environment. Prosperity and opportunity are related, but are not always the same issue; Americans have the opportunity to work, but even full-time jobs do not always lead to prosperity as defined above.

5. Use the vision statement year after year for maximum effect.

A vision statement becomes common knowledge with repetition and time. It can be used in its entirety or in part, either word for word, or reworded to fit the specific communication need.

What should a progressive vision statement look like?

- It should communicate the progressive view of good government and present a clear alternative to conservatism.
- It should be a forward-looking statement of positive goals – not a list of problems and solutions.
- It should be information-rich. It should focus on values and how those values relate to each other in a larger vision.
- It should be simply stated. It should avoid words with pre-associated meanings and buzzwords that may be distracting. It should not be a collection of clever slogans.
- Each point should present a complete thought – like a mini-elevator speech.
- It should be structured to help convey a more comprehensive vision.
- It should be brief.

“We Are Progressives,” a proposed progressive vision statement, meets these criteria. (See page 2)

V. A comparison between “We Are Progressives” and “Republican Principles”

| Concept | Progressive Vision Statement | Conservative Statement |
|-----------------------------|--|---|
| Good Government | <p>“We Are Progressives”</p> <p><i>We believe America’s promise of security, prosperity, and liberty belongs to all Americans. We believe our nation’s strength lies in a shared commitment to these ideals.</i></p> <p><i>Protecting Personal Liberty</i></p> <p>Progressive Definition: Good Government</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seeks to find the best solutions in order to meet national challenges. • Serves as a catalyst to promote conditions that increase personal liberty and enables all citizens to reach their fullest potential • The citizens’ tool for the protection of personal security, liberty, and prosperity | <p>“Republican Principles”</p> <p><i>I believe the proper role of government is to provide for the people only those critical functions that cannot be performed by individuals or private organizations and that the best government is that which governs least.</i></p> <p><i>I believe the most effective, responsible and responsive government is government closest to the people.</i></p> <p><i>Finally, I believe that the Republican Party is the best vehicle for translating these ideals into positive and successful principles of government.</i></p> <p>Conservative Definition: Good Government</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good government is limited government and must not constrain the freedom of citizens to reach their fullest potential. |
| Source of National Strength | <p>“We Are Progressives”</p> <p><i>We believe America’s promise of security, prosperity, and liberty belongs to all Americans. We believe our nation’s strength lies in a shared commitment to these ideals.</i></p> <p>Progressive Definition: Source of National Strength</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All – Without discrimination, inclusive, a word to unify • We – Reinforces the common and collective responsibilities and benefits of being a U.S. citizen | <p>“Republican Principles”</p> <p><i>The strength of our nation lies with the individual and that each person’s dignity, freedom, ability and responsibility must be honored.</i></p> <p>Conservative: Source of National Strength</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I – The individual • Each person |
| The Common Good | <p>“We Are Progressives”</p> <p><i>We believe America’s promise of security, prosperity, and liberty belongs to all Americans. We believe our nation’s strength lies in a shared commitment to these ideals.</i></p> <p>Progressive Definition: The Common Good</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See Good Government. • All citizens, regardless of social or economic status, making their contribution to the security, prosperity, and freedom of the nation | <p>“Republican Principles”</p> <p><i>I believe the proper role of government is to provide for the people only those critical functions that cannot be performed by individuals or private organizations and that the best government is that which governs least.</i></p> <p>Conservative Definition: The Common Good</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The common good is best served by the private sector. |

| Concept | Progressive | Conservative |
|-----------------------|--|--|
| Democracy | <p>“We Are Progressives”</p> <p><i>Protects personal liberty</i></p> <p><i>We believe the cornerstone of democracy is transparent government with honest elections.</i></p> <p>Progressive Definition: Democracy</p> <p>Democracy is the citizen’s tool to guard against the concentration of power and influence in the hands of an individual, group, or governmental agency or branch. Ensures good government.</p> | <p><i>No mention</i></p> |
| National Security | <p>“We Are Progressives”</p> <p><i>We believe true leadership with global cooperation is the best way to secure peace.</i></p> <p><i>We believe the power of the United States and our military might must be used honestly and wisely.</i></p> <p><i>We believe acting on environmental challenges strengthens our nation and protects the Earth.</i></p> <p>Progressive Definition: National Security</p> <p>Peace – a key component of national and economic security in the USA and globally</p> <p>Wisely – well conceived and with honest purpose</p> <p>Environmental challenges –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refers to use of resources and sustainable practice. • A matter of personal, national, worldwide security • An acknowledgment of the impact the USA has on the Earth | <p>“Republican Principles”</p> <p><i>I believe Americans value and should preserve our national strength and pride while working to extend peace, freedom and human rights throughout the world.</i></p> <p>Conservative Definition: National Security</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peace most surely is protected through military strength. America should not hesitate to use its power and influence prudently to shape a world friendly to American interests and values.¹⁴ |
| Fiscal Responsibility | <p>“We Are Progressives”</p> <p><i>We believe efficient government, effective public investments, and fiscal responsibility serve our citizens best.</i></p> <p>Progressive Definition: Fiscal Responsibility</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The opposite of cronyism. • Taxes raised and spent benefit the common good, not private enrichment. | <p>“Republican Principles”</p> <p><i>I believe government must practice fiscal responsibility and allow individuals to keep more of the money they earn.</i></p> <p>Conservative Definition: Fiscal Responsibility</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lower taxes |
| Responsibility | <p>“We Are Progressives”</p> <p><i>We believe responsibility, honesty, and compassion are fundamental to a successful nation.</i></p> <p>Progressive Definition: Responsibility</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responsibility as trustworthiness • Applies to personal, community, media, business, corporate responsibility. Responsible government is trustworthy. Applies to public servants and governmental agencies. | <p>“Republican Principles”</p> <p><i>I believe the strength of our nation lies with the individual and that each person’s dignity, freedom, ability and responsibility must be honored.</i></p> <p>Conservative Definition: Responsibility</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responsibility as in ability • Individuals need freedom to exercise responsibility. |

| Concept | Progressive | Conservative |
|------------------------------|---|--|
| Good Citizenship | <p>“We Are Progressives”</p> <p><i>We believe responsibility, honesty, and compassion are fundamental to a successful nation.</i></p> <p><i>We believe in the values of freedom, fairness, and respect.</i></p> <p>Progressive Definition: Good Citizenship</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responsibility as in trustworthiness • Fairness is an ethical standard. • Good citizens do not abuse power. • Respect for all communities and respect for differences between individuals | <p>“Republican Principles”</p> <p><i>The strength of our nation lies with the individual and that each person’s dignity, freedom, ability and responsibility must be honored.</i></p> <p>Conservative Definition: Good Citizenship</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responsibility as in ability |
| Prosperity | <p>“We Are Progressives”</p> <p><i>We believe prosperity begins with every American’s right to be healthy, educated, and to live in a safe community and a clean environment.</i></p> <p>Progressive Definition: Prosperity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prosperity is defined as it relates to people’s lives. • National and personal prosperity are inseparable. • Key indicators of prosperity include healthy and educated people living in safe homes, safe communities, and in a clean environment. | <p>“Republican Principles”</p> <p><i>I believe free enterprise and encouraging individual initiative have brought this nation opportunity, economic growth and prosperity.</i></p> <p>Conservative Definition: Prosperity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prosperity is defined as an economic issue. • Economic growth • Free enterprise • Encouraging individual initiative |
| Good Economy | <p>“We Are Progressives”</p> <p><i>We believe a vibrant economy is built with American jobs, well-paid productive workers, innovation, and the entrepreneurial spirit.</i></p> <p>Progressive Definition: Good Economy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A vibrant economy is fueled by ethical competition, innovation, and the entrepreneurial spirit. Prosperous employees and prosperous employers result. | <p>“Republican Principles”</p> <p><i>I believe free enterprise and encouraging individual initiative have brought this nation opportunity, economic growth and prosperity.</i></p> <p>Conservative Definition: Good Economy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic growth • Free enterprise • Encouraging individual initiative |
| Opportunity Social Justice | <p>“We Are Progressives”</p> <p><i>We believe all citizens have the right to enjoy their full civil liberties with equal access to opportunity and justice.</i></p> <p>Progressive Definition: Opportunity, Social Justice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Civil liberties • Emphasizing <i>access</i> is an expansion of equal rights. | <p>“Republican Principles”</p> <p><i>I believe in equal rights, equal justice and equal opportunity for all, regardless of race, creed, sex, age or disability.</i></p> <p>Conservative Definition: Opportunity, Social Justice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Civil liberties |
| Health, Education, Community | <p>“We Are Progressives”</p> <p><i>We believe prosperity begins with every American’s right to be healthy, educated, and to live in a safe community and a clean environment.</i></p> <p>Progressive Definition: Health, Education, Community</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When health, education, safe communities, a clean environment are not considered to be rights in the same way justice and opportunity are – they become privileges. | <p>“Republican Principles”</p> <p><i>No mention</i></p> <p>Conservative Definition: Health, Education, Community</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The private sector can be depended upon to make better economic decisions than the public sector in 99 out of 100 cases.¹⁵ |

| Concept | Progressive | Conservative |
|-----------------|---|---|
| The Environment | <p>“We Are Progressives”</p> <p><i>We believe acting on environmental challenges strengthens our nation and protects the Earth.</i></p> <p><i>We believe prosperity begins with every American’s right to be healthy, educated, and to live in a safe community and a clean environment.</i></p> <p>Progressive Definition: The Environment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A matter of personal, national, worldwide security • A clean environment is a human right. • Refers to use of resources and sustainable practices | <p>“Republican Principles”</p> <p><i>No mention</i></p> <p>Conservative Definition: The Environment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The private sector can be depended upon to make better economic decisions than the public sector in 99 out of 100 cases.¹⁶ |

VI. Conclusion as it relates to progressives

The lesson to be learned from the rise of conservatism is that a “clearly defined and consistent philosophy” is important to the success of a political movement.

Today, the American people may be in the process of rejecting the conservative concept of government, but progressives have yet to present a new vision of good government. Progressives may win elections, but will be hampered in their efforts to lead without the ability to communicate how their values further America’s promise of security, prosperity, and liberty for all Americans.

The need for a unifying vision has been the topic of many reports, books, and articles. “*WeAre Progressives*,” is offered as a model in hope that it will encourage serious action on the part of the progressive leadership to develop and make use of a progressive vision statement.

The relationship between the conservative movement and the Republican Party is explained by William Rusher: “I have found it useful to think of the Republican Party as a bottle, and the conservative movement as the wine it contains. The bottle has little significance on its own; its importance lies in its contents. It is the vehicle for its contents, which could not maintain or promote themselves on their own. The party and the movement, in other words, need each other badly.”¹⁷

Notes

The grassroots origins of “*We Are Progressives*,” a proposed progressive vision statement

In response to President Bush’s reelection in 2004, Kim Paxson began talking with Democrats, Independents, Republicans, and concerned Americans about the proper role of government and the need for a long-term progressive vision statement.

In 2005, she attended the Democracy for America Meet-up in Austin, Texas where grassroots Democrats and progressives from across the country offered suggestions, criticisms, and observations on the first draft of a long-term vision statement. There she met Hannah Banks, an architect from Boston, who was interested in moving the project forward.

During their individual travels, Paxson and Banks continued their conversations with people they met along the way. Many drafts later, Paxson and Banks informally discussed a more developed vision statement draft with fellow attendees at the 2006 Take Back America conference in Washington D.C. After the conference, Banks moved on to other projects. Paxson continued to refine the vision statement in response to conversations, emails, and comments from postings on Daily Kos and Burnt Orange Report. More edits were made in response to a state-wide email sent by Bill Perkison to Texas Democratic Party county chairs and Senate District Committee members. In the spring of 2007, the Democratic Party of Kimble and Kerr counties adopted a Democratic Party version of “*We Are Progressives*” as their vision statement and submitted it to the Texas Democratic Party resolution committee for statewide consideration.

This entire project has been a grassroots volunteer effort. Kim Paxson views her role as facilitator and wordsmith.

About the author

Kim Paxson lives in the Texas Hill Country and can be reached by email at kpax@ctesc.net. This report can be downloaded from www.kimpaxson.com/progressives.htm

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