
INTRODUCTION

By House Budget Committee Chairman Paul Ryan

This budget offers a blueprint for safeguarding America from the perils of debt, doubt and decline. Americans, not Washington, deserve to choose the path their nation takes, and this budget presents a clear choice between the bleak future toward which the nation is currently headed and the prosperous future that Americans can build together with a government that is limited and effective.

Effective government is impossible without limits. It is no surprise that trust in government has reached all-time lows as the size of government has reached all-time highs. The Founders put limits *on* government because they understood the limits *of* government. In James Madison's formulation, "If men were angels, no government would be necessary. And if angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary." As Madison reminded us, men are no angels, and government is "administered by men over men."

The Founders met this challenge by designing a Constitution of enumerated powers, giving the federal government broad authority over only those matters that must have a single national response, while sharply restricting its authority to intrude on those spheres of activity better left to the states and the people.

The first responsibility of the federal government is the safety and security of all Americans. Today, the men and women of the U.S. military valiantly devote themselves to protecting American lives and liberty. Peace at home is only possible when America is strong. When America shrinks from her commitments to her allies and her duties to her citizens, her enemies are emboldened and her ideals are diminished. This overarching governmental responsibility – securing the inherent rights of all Americans to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness – is the principle and the purpose that informs this entire federal budget.

The federal government also has a critical role to play in safeguarding the free-enterprise system, so that fraud is punished, success is rewarded, and the rules are not rigged against the small businessman, the innovator, or the worker. In Abraham Lincoln's words, the true object of government should be "to clear the paths of laudable pursuit for all," so that all may have the same opportunity to rise.

The federal government can help provide a strong safety net for Americans who, through no fault of their own, have fallen on hard times. But government can never replace the core institutions of a vibrant civil society – families, neighbors, churches and charities. Aimed first and foremost at buttressing these institutions, government reforms should promote upward mobility and secure opportunity, especially for society's most vulnerable.

Over the past century, the American people have sought to furnish a strong and stable base of health and retirement security for working families. In a free society built on entrepreneurial risk-taking and hard work, such protection provides insurance against the vagaries of life. But when government mismanagement and political cowardice turn this element of the social contract into an empty promise, seniors are threatened with denied access to care and the next generation is threatened with a debt that destroys its hard-earned prosperity.

Both consequences would violate President Lyndon B. Johnson's pledge upon signing the Medicare law: "No longer will older Americans be denied the healing miracle of modern medicine... No longer will young families see their own incomes, and their own hopes, eaten away simply because they are carrying out their deep moral obligations to their parents, and to their uncles, and their aunts." To fulfill Johnson's pledge in the 21st century, America's generations-old health and retirement security programs must be saved and strengthened.

The federal government has the power to raise revenue so that it can effectively carry out those missions entrusted to it by its citizens. But when taxation is carried to injurious excess to fund activities outside the proper sphere of government, it not only harms the general welfare, but also suppresses revenue itself. As Alexander Hamilton – whose fiscal plan brought national prosperity while eliminating America’s first federal debt – once observed, “the most productive system of finance will always be the least burdensome.”

Finally, the federal government has an obligation to all Americans to account for the spending, taxing, and borrowing that it undertakes in their names. But when the federal budgeting process is ignored, government spends haphazardly, without priorities or the transparency on which democracy depends.

In each of these core areas, the unchecked growth of government has degraded its effectiveness and rendered its institutions incapable of meeting the challenges of the 21st Century.

- The U.S. military faces a three-fold threat: an abatement of America’s commitment to defend its interests abroad, a slow economy, and an uncontrolled debt burden that weakens America from within by eroding resources for national defense;
- The free enterprise system is being stifled by a federal bureaucracy fixated on depriving citizens and businesses of their ability to make social and economic decisions according to what is best for their own needs and interests.
- The social safety net is failing society’s most vulnerable citizens and poised to unravel in the event of a spending-driven debt crisis, which is precisely when Americans would need it most;
- The future of the nation’s health and retirement security programs is increasingly based on empty promises from a government unwilling to advance solutions that save and strengthen them;
- The tax code has become a broken maze of complexity and political favoritism; it is overgrown with special-interest loopholes and characterized by high rates, both of which stifle economic growth and job creation; and
- The federal budget process has collapsed, allowing government to spend recklessly and throw tax dollars at problems on an *ad hoc* basis as the nation’s fiscal hole grows deeper.

The good news is that solutions to these problems are more attainable today than they have been in years: There is an emerging consensus – led by citizens across the nation and reformers across the political spectrum – that is well aware of the danger. This consensus rejects politicians who focus on dividing Americans for political gain. Instead, it supports bold reforms that bring Americans together to build upon the solid foundations of security and liberty that have made this nation exceptional:

- A military that keeps America safe by letting national strategic priorities determine spending levels, not the other way around;
- A free enterprise system that is reinvigorated, with bureaucracy restrained, the rule of law restored, and cronyism and corporate welfare eliminated;
- A safety net that directs assistance to those who need it most, provides greater incentives to work and save, and strengthens programs aimed at job training and helping Americans get back on their feet;
- Health and retirement programs that avert the sharp disruptions to come as a result of the President’s policies, protect key commitments to seniors, and provide greater choices, better health, and real security for future generations;
- A tax code that fosters growth and job creation by lowering rates and getting rid of special-interest loopholes that mainly benefit the politically well-connected, distort economic growth, and encode unfairness in tax law; and
- A budget process that restrains government spending and restores certainty by forcing policymakers to provide solutions for the nation’s fiscal future.

This nation has faced many tests in its history – moments in time when the very idea of America was threatened by crises at home and abroad. Each time, Americans rejected radical proposals to remake this exceptional nation in the image of less-free nations abroad. Instead, principled leaders and brave citizens rose to meet the difficulties they faced by applying the nation’s enduring founding principles to the challenges of their times.

Today, America is struggling to recover from a great recession. Her people's liberties are endangered by unwarranted expansions of government. And she is threatened by a rising tide of debt at home and fierce enemies abroad. But as the challenge grows, so does the opportunity to restore America's promise and prosperity.

In the words of Winston Churchill, this generation has the opportunity "to rejoice in the responsibilities with which destiny has honored us... and be proud that we are guardians of our country in an age when her life is at stake." We must not let this opportunity slip away.

This budget serves as a blueprint for American renewal. Its principled reforms empower individuals with greater control over their futures. It places great faith in the wisdom of the Founders and promises to renew confidence in the superiority of human freedom. The choice of two futures presented in this budget is premised on the wisdom of the American people to build a prosperous future for themselves and for generations of Americans to come.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Paul", with a large, stylized initial "P" and "R".

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