

ONWARD!

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The idea of *Mandate for Leadership* was first conceived in the fall of 1979 at a Heritage Foundation board of trustees meeting when former Treasury Secretary Bill Simon and former General Services Administration Administrator Jack Eckerd discussed the predicament they had faced when they first joined a new, more conservative presidential Administration: They received no practical plans on how to move their part of the federal bureaucracy to reflect a more conservative policy direction other than vague exhortations to promote free markets; smaller, more efficient government; and a stronger national defense. In their new positions, they were briefed either by holdover appointees from the former liberal Administration or by career civil servants who, inevitably, had a vested interest in maintaining the status quo.

The discussion became quite animated as these Heritage board members recalled transitioning to government positions from their former lives in the private sector—moving their families, finding new homes, and uprooting their children’s education while they assumed new responsibilities in a very different environment.

Frank Shakespeare, who had headed the United States Information Agency during the Cold War, noted that electoral politics is what gets a President and Vice President elected and sent to Washington, but then policy politics is what they had to focus on to do the right thing once they got the big job.

Former Navy Secretary and Ambassador Bill Middendorf added that there must be a better way to prepare for real change in a more conservative direction in the political environment in Washington. If a conservative candidate were to become

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the President-elect in just 16 months, what could be done by an outside group to prepare for these new opportunities?

The staff at Heritage took this idea on as a challenge, and it would become the defining policy decision in the early history of this upstart think tank. Task forces of knowledgeable volunteers were formed with specific expertise in the whole range of policy issues—from welfare reform to national defense reform.

The vision for *Mandate for Leadership* was that it would serve as a guidebook of specific policy recommendations for reducing the size and scope of the federal government and for ensuring that it stayed within its constitutional bounds. Positive plans for freeing the private sector from overblown government interference and regulation could, we believed, result in an explosion of entrepreneurial activity that would reassert America's leading role in the world's economy.

Thus, if conservatives finally gained control in Washington, they were prepared to answer the question, "What is the conservative agenda?"

Candidate, then President-elect, then President Ronald Reagan's "feisty new kid on the conservative block—The Heritage Foundation"—had the answer, and it was *Mandate for Leadership*.

First published in January 1981, the original *Mandate* served as a conservative plan of action for the Reagan Administration, providing much of the blueprint for the Reagan Revolution. It contained more than 2,000 detailed, actionable policy recommendations to move the federal government in a conservative direction.

The recommendations ranged from internal bureaucratic reorganizations to plans to implement specific, fundamental changes in every imaginable policy area—from tax and regulatory reform to strengthening national defense to reforming social programs. All were carefully crafted, vetted, and pieced together.

On January 21, 1981, at the first meeting of his Cabinet, President Reagan distributed copies of *Mandate*, and many of the study's authors were recruited into the Administration to implement its recommendations.

In the foreword of that first edition, I wrote, "What is offered by the authors is a series of proposals which, if implemented, will help revitalize our economy, strengthen our national security, and halt the centralization of power in the federal government."

The conservative movement had found in Ronald Reagan a President who shared that vision and who had the will to go against the established political grain in Washington. He also had the ability to speak directly to the American people and convincingly show them how those ideas could work for the benefit of all.

Mandate's proven ideas and President Reagan's skill at communicating their benefits led to his Administration implementing almost half of the recommendations by the end of his first year in office.

Those recommendations led to tax cuts and other economic policies that gave America one of the longest periods of peacetime economic growth in its

history—with an annual growth rate that has not been rivaled since then. The recommendations led to a rebuilding of the United States military, helped to bring an end to the Cold War and to the Soviet Union itself, and reinvigorated the American people with a collective sense of pride and patriotism that many thought had vanished forever.

After that first edition, a new *Mandate* was produced every four years. But the 2016 edition was one of particular note. It earned significant attention from the Trump Administration, as Heritage had accumulated a backlog of conservative ideas that had been blocked by President Barack Obama and his team.

Soon after President Donald Trump was sworn in, his Administration began to implement major parts of the 2016 *Mandate*. After his first year in office, the Administration had implemented 64 percent of its policy recommendations.

As a result of those recommendations, the Trump Administration cut taxes and eliminated unnecessary regulations, creating a growing economy and the lowest unemployment rate in five decades—including among minorities and women. It made America a net energy exporter for the first time in half a century. It also prioritized veterans' care and rebuilt our national defenses.

As I noted above, in his first year in office, President Reagan implemented nearly half of *Mandate's* recommendations—an extraordinary feat. In 2018, in an interview on Fox News, I mentioned that President Trump had implemented more recommendations in his first year than Ronald Reagan did in his. Of course, at the time, Reagan did not have both a Republican House and Senate as Trump did. Nonetheless, President Trump liked being compared to a former President he deeply admired, and he touted the comparison frequently.

This anecdote illustrates how *Mandate* provides a yardstick for conservative Presidents to measure their performance relative to one another. And, very importantly, it allows the American people to see concrete evidence of the progress an Administration is making toward reversing the growth of government and implementing conservative solutions in its stead. In essence, it allows the American people to hold their politicians accountable to the principles they profess to believe in.

When we were producing that first *Mandate* edition, we had suffered under four years of Jimmy Carter with double-digit inflation, double-digit interest rates, high unemployment, gasoline rationing, weakness overseas, and what Carter himself called a malaise that he had induced in the American people.

In the 1981 *Mandate* foreword, I wrote:

The full recovery of our nation in both the economic and foreign policy spheres will require the sustained application of sound policies over several years. There are no “quick fix” solutions to problems that have been years in the making. But no time must be lost in taking the first decisive steps on the road to recovery.

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Today, President Joe Biden has brought us back to the days of Jimmy Carter—actually, even worse—with full-bore economic, military, cultural, and foreign policy turmoil. The advice that I wrote more than four decades ago just as easily could have been written today. A conservative Administration coming on board in 2025 will need to hit the ground running just to undo the significant damage that will have been done during the Biden years.

Something that is essential to ensuring that a new President in 2025 can successfully implement a conservative agenda is having the right personnel to run the executive branch departments and their agencies.

This is why it is so often said that “people are policy.” The Cabinet secretaries, deputy secretaries, undersecretaries, assistant secretaries, deputy assistant secretaries, administrators, agency heads, and on and on that a new President chooses to place throughout the executive branch must be principled individuals already aligned with the President’s conservative vision. And they must be willing to execute it on the President’s behalf.

These personnel choices will ultimately determine the success or failure of the policy agenda and, hence, of the whole Administration.

Presidential appointees not only are critical to implementing the policy agenda, but also must serve to “watch the watchers” in the departments and agencies they oversee. They must ensure accountability as well as provide a check on the inherent nature of the administrative state to overreach its authority.

For example, they must rein in the Environmental Protection Agency, which declared backyard streams navigable waterways that then fall under its authority. They must rein in the Internal Revenue Service, including its 87,000 new employees hired to pick through every detail of what Americans make and how they spend their money. They must rein in agencies such as the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, which the Biden Administration weaponized to attempt to force COVID-19 vaccine mandates on 84 million Americans through their workplaces.

When these new presidential appointees come into office, it is often the career bureaucrats who end up orienting them to their new positions. Many of these bureaucrats are all too comfortable with the status quo. Appointees have only four years (eight at the most) to effect change and make a difference. They need a road map to do that starting on Day One.

That road map is exactly what *Mandate* provides. It is not a mandate to maintain the status quo but just do it a little more efficiently. Rather, it is a mandate to significantly advance conservative principles in practice and demonstrate to the American people that where liberal policies generally fail, conservative solutions succeed in making life better for all of us.

From the original 1981 Reagan-era *Mandate for Leadership* to this edition for 2025, the purpose remains the same: to present concrete proposals to revitalize

our economy, strengthen our national security, and halt the centralization of power in the federal government.

In Washington, there are no permanent victories. But neither are there permanent defeats. Rather, there are permanent battles throughout the policy arena. The other side is never standing still. While we may achieve tremendous successes under conservative leaders, the Left is always working to chip away at them, which is why we must constantly be prepared for the next fight.

That's why today, Heritage President Kevin Roberts, Project 2025 Director Paul Dans, the whole Heritage team, more than 50 organizations, and more than 360 experts from throughout the conservative movement have come together to continue the *Mandate for Leadership* tradition of creating policy solutions to solve the biggest issues facing America—solutions based on the core principles of free enterprise, limited government, individual freedom, traditional American values, and a strong national defense.

We do this not to expand government, grow its largesse for some special interest, or centralize more control in Washington. Instead, we do this to build an America where freedom, opportunity, prosperity, and civil society flourish for all.

One final note: As most readers know, this section of a book is usually called the “Afterword,” but we have decided to title it “Onward!”

In all the decades that I served as The Heritage Foundation's founder and president—and to this day as a member of its Board of Trustees—I have ended my communications with the exhortation “Onward!” This has been my charge to encourage friends, colleagues, and allies that we must always be advancing. There are always new battles *and* new opportunities ahead to challenge us to do even more, and we must be ready for them, willing to engage, and use them to work for the betterment of this nation and her people.

An afterword connotes finality, but “Onward!” signals that our next mission is just beginning.

That is the message I leave you with today. *Onward!*