

Section One

TAKING THE REINS OF GOVERNMENT

America’s Bicentennial, which culminated on July 4, 1976, was a spirited and unifying celebration of our country, its Founding, and its ideals. As we approach our nation’s 250th anniversary, which will take place during the next presidency, America is now divided between two opposing forces: woke revolutionaries and those who believe in the ideals of the American revolution. The former believe that America is—and always has been—“systemically racist” and that it is not worth celebrating and must be fundamentally transformed, largely through a centralized administrative state. The latter believe in America’s history and heroes, its principles and promise, and in everyday Americans and the American way of life. They believe in the Constitution and republican government. Conservatives—the Americanists in this battle—must fight for the soul of America, which is very much at stake.

Just two years after the death of the last surviving Constitutional Convention delegate, James Madison, Abraham Lincoln warned that the greatest threat to America would come not from without, but from within. This is evident today: Whether it be mask and vaccine mandates, school and business closures, efforts to keep Americans from driving gas cars or using gas stoves, or efforts to defund the police, indoctrinate schoolchildren, alter beloved books, abridge free speech, undermine the colorblind ideal, or deny the biological reality that there are only two sexes, the Left’s steady stream of insanity appears to be never-ending. The next Administration must stand up for American ideals, American families, and American culture—all things in which, thankfully, most Americans still believe.

Highlighting this need, former director of the Office of Management and Budget Russ Vought writes in Chapter 2, “The modern conservative President’s task is to

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limit, control, and direct the executive branch on behalf of the American people.” At the core of this goal is the work of the White House and the central personnel agencies. Article II of the Constitution vests all federal executive power in a President, made accountable to the citizenry through regular elections. Our Founders wrote, “The executive Power shall be vested in a President of the United States of America.” Accordingly, Vought writes, “it is *the President’s agenda* that should matter to the departments and agencies,” not their own.

Yet the federal bureaucracy has a mind of its own. Federal employees are often ideologically aligned—not with the majority of the American people—but with one another, posing a profound problem for republican government, a government “of, by, and for” the people. As Donald Devine, Dennis Kirk, and Paul Dans write in Chapter 3, “An autonomous bureaucracy has neither independent constitutional status nor separate moral legitimacy.” Byzantine personnel rules provide the bureaucrats with their chief means of self-protection. What’s more, knowledge of such rules is used to thwart the President’s appointees and agenda. As Devine, Kirk, and Dans write, “Managing the immense bureaucracy of the federal government is impossible without an understanding of the key central personnel agencies and their governing laws and regulations.”

Many of these laws and regulations governing a largely underworked, over-compensated, and unaccountable federal civilian workforce are so irrational that they would be comical in a less important context. This is true whether it comes to evaluating employees’ performance or hiring new employees. Only in the federal government could an applicant in the hiring process be sent to the *front* of the line because of a “history of drug addiction” or “alcoholism,” or due to “morbid obesity,” “irritable bowel syndrome,” or a “psychiatric disorder.” The next Administration should insist that the federal government’s hiring, evaluation, retention, and compensation practices benefit taxpayers, rather than benefiting the lowest rung of the federal workforce.

In order to carry out the President’s desires, political appointees must be given the tools, knowledge, and support to overcome the federal government’s obstructionist Human Resources departments. More fundamentally, the new Administration must fill its ranks with political appointees. Devine, Kirk, and Dans observe that “the Trump Administration appointed fewer political appointees in its first few months in office” than any other recent presidency. This left career employees in charge in many places. This can occur even after departments have been fully staffed with political appointees. Vought writes that the White House Office of Management and Budget (OMB) should establish a “reputation as the keeper of ‘commander’s intent,’” yet OMB is dominated by career employees who often try to overrule political appointees serving in the various executive departments. Empowering political appointees across the Administration is crucial to a President’s success.

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Above all, the President and those who serve under him or her must be committed to the Constitution and the rule of law. This is particularly true of a conservative Administration, which knows that the President is there to uphold the Constitution, not the other way around. If a conservative Administration does not respect the Constitution, no Administration will. In Chapter 1, former deputy chief of staff to the President Rick Dearborn writes that the White House Counsel “must take seriously the duty to protect the powers and privileges of the President from encroachments by Congress, the judiciary, and the administrative components of departments and agencies.” Equally important, the President must enforce the Constitution and laws as written, rather than proclaiming new “law” unilaterally. Presidents should not issue mask or vaccine mandates, arbitrarily transfer student loan debt, or issue monarchical mandates of any sort. Legislatures make the laws in a republic, not executives.

It is crucial that all three branches of the federal government respect what Madison called the “double security” to our liberties: the separation of powers among the three branches, and the separation of powers between the federal government and the states. This double security has been greatly compromised over the years. Vought writes that “the modern executive branch...writes federal policy, enforces that policy, and often adjudicates whether that policy was properly drafted and enforced.” He describes this as “constitutionally dire” and “in urgent need of repair,” adding: “Nothing less than the survival of self-governance in America is at stake.”

When it comes to ensuring that freedom can flourish, nothing is more important than deconstructing the centralized administrative state. Political appointees who are answerable to the President and have decision-making authority in the executive branch are key to this essential task. The next Administration must not cede such authority to non-partisan “experts,” who pursue their own ends while engaging in groupthink, insulated from American voters. The following chapters detail how the next Administration can be responsive to the American people (not to entrenched “elites”); how it can take care that all the laws are “faithfully executed,” not merely those that the President desires to see executed; and how it can achieve results and not be stymied by an unelected bureaucracy.