A Second Chance for Freedom

By Joseph L. Bast

The election of Donald Trump as president of the United States and Republican victories down the ballot in Congress and in state capitols across the country were good news for freedom lovers. We have an opportunity to avoid an abyss – a second chance the nation probably didn’t deserve but can now embrace.

Why Trump Won

Donald Trump’s victory in the national election will be the subject of countless books for many years. Why did he win?

Perhaps because the Democrats nominated a weak candidate, or because voters were ready, as they often are after eight years of single-party rule of the White House, for a change. Or the near absence of economic growth and income mobility, and the near-consensus that the nation was heading in the wrong direction, meant any Republican who won the party’s nomination would have won the election.

Maybe Trump won by taking on “political correctness,” speaking out forcefully against the language police and their anti-religious, anti-capitalist, and anti-freedom dogmas. Maybe he won by being more entertaining than the Democrat candidate, not just during the campaign but during his career as a reality TV show host.

Trump may have won because people like Stephen Bannon, Kellyanne Conway, and other lesser-known figures conducted a brilliant campaign that utilized social media, targeted key states necessary to win in the Electoral College, and played to their candidate’s strengths and their opponent’s weaknesses. Maybe Hillary Clinton lost the election by failing to show up or invest enough in key battleground states.

I suspect Trump would have lost “but for” most or even all of those reasons. Every candidate has strengths and weaknesses, which we exaggerate after the election based on whether they win or lose. Every winning campaign was “brilliant” just as every losing campaign was “poorly run.”
The Obama Legacy

Eight years of Barack Obama left the nation poorer, more divided, and less free. The number of people living in poverty is near a record high. Racial tensions are high despite the election and reelection of the country’s first black president, events that were supposed to finally put to rest claims that America is a racist nation.

Progressives resurrected the failed Keynesian policies of a previous failed presidency, that of Jimmy Carter. They raised taxes and spending, increased regulations, and centralized power in the hands of a massive government bureaucracy located in Washington, DC. Enabled by an often lax and compliant Republican Party, Obama oversaw an almost incredible increase in sheer power and resources held by the executive branch.

Meanwhile, the socialist Left completed its “march through the institutions,” taking over and exercising its control of the mainstream media, colleges and universities, Hollywood, and even scientific and religious organizations. The combination of the rise of centralized power and demise of competing sources of influence – Alexis de Tocqueville’s “little platoons” – caused freedom to retreat at the national level even as conservatives and libertarians posted major gains at the state and local levels.

We watched, seemingly helplessly, as what Angelo Codevilla calls the “new ruling class” emerged in techno-color and announced its intention to bestow on the rest of us, by nudging if sufficient and force if necessary, its undoubtably true insights into race, gender, economics, justice, and even complex scientific matters such as global warming.

Freedom’s Second Chance

Regardless of how it came about, the new Trump administration has an opportunity to turn the nation away from economic stagnation, racial and class division, and socialism and toward economic prosperity, harmony, and freedom.

Trump has huge advantages over previous Republican presidents. His party controls both houses of Congress and more chambers of state legislatures and more governor’s mansions than in nearly a century. His predecessor advanced his agenda largely through executive orders, which Trump is free to repeal “with the stroke of a pen.”

Trump’s opposition is in disarray, having lost touch with middle-Americans along with its bench of young leaders holding offices at the state level. Half of the Democratic Party’s grassroots supporters side with a rabid socialism that a majority of the American people emphatically reject, while the other half, composed mostly of retired government employees and rent-seekers, wants to live off past policies that have driven the country to the brink of financial ruin.

Neither wing of the Democratic Party offers a vision most Americans embrace. Trump can step into this vacuum, supported by a unified and much more principled Republican Party than existed even eight years ago, and perhaps even backed by a Supreme Court majority that recognizes constitutional restrictions on the exercise of power by the national government.
This is truly a second chance for freedom to rise, at least during the next four years and perhaps for much longer.

**Helping Freedom Rise**

Trump’s first steps since the election have been promising. Many of his nominees for cabinet positions are freedom fighters, people who have supported reining in the Environmental Protection Agency, expanding school choice, and cutting taxes and the deficit. Whether this hopeful start translates into a successful presidency remains to be seen.

You can help freedom rise! You could go to Washington, DC and help the new administration dismantle eight years of monstrous government growth and unconstitutional regulation. Morton Blackwell, president of the Leadership Institute (and winner of the 2016 Heartland Liberty Prize), sent an email around a few weeks ago with some excellent advice on how to apply for positions in the new administration.

Start by reviewing the online “Plum Book” of positions that will be filled in the Trump administration, then go to the official Presidential Transition portal at www.greatagain.gov and apply for jobs you think you are qualified to hold. To signal your commitment to the freedom philosophy, fill out the Leadership Institute Presidential Personnel Referral Form at https://www.conservativejobs.com, and also go to www.heritage.org and click on the “Restore America Project” button.

The Heartland Institute has produced an “Action Plan for President Trump,” which you can view at www.heartland.org. We also partnered with the National Tax Limitation Committee, one of the oldest and most respected taxpayer organizations in the country, to produce a detailed and seminal report titled “Roadmap for the 21st Century,” which is also easy to find on Heartland’s website.

Top priorities for the new administration should be ending Obama’s war on fossil fuels in the name of “global warming”; repealing and replacing Obamacare; cutting spending and balancing the national budget; and repealing all of Obama’s unconstitutional executive orders and “midnight regulations.”

The Heartland Institute is already working hard to help the new administration hit the ground running. We need and appreciate your help – as a volunteer, friend, ally, or financial supporter. Please go to www.heartland.org and click on the “donate” button, or give us a call at 312/377-4000. By working together, we can make 2017 a great year for freedom!

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