



Written by on March 16, 2010

Mount Vernon Statement Shoptalk

Our country is in trouble. Ongoing military commitments, enormous indebtedness, high unemployment, failing schools, citizen restlessness, and a President and Congress trying to lead the nation into socialism. So what should be done to correct all of this?

A group of conservative activists decided to produce what could be labeled a new creed for Americans. On February 17, they gathered at George Washington's former home and issued their brief manifesto entitled "The Mount Vernon Statement." Its subtitle proclaims that it is "Constitutional Conservatism: A Statement for the 21st Century." Without explicitly saying so, the 18 MVS signers evidently believe that America's woes would disappear if their page-and-a-half of declarations could be adopted and adhered to by all Americans, especially government leaders who are currently running the nation into the ground.



This latest political call to arms brings back memories of Newt Gingrich's 1994 "Contract With America." Voters across the land had just given the GOP control of both Houses of Congress, and prospects for a much-needed shrinking of government were excellent. Also, Newt was a shoo-in to become Speaker, and as the leader of the conservative's mini-revolution, he was looked upon as a great champion possessed of sufficient power to rescue America from the pernicious Clinton agenda. But the Contract With America was truly a pile of fluff that, even if completely enacted, would have accomplished little or none of the government retrenching that voters truly wanted. Gingrich had deftly destroyed any chance that it would.

While MVS proposes no legislative agenda, it does resemble its Gingrich-produced predecessor in that there was no need for the 1994 contract and no need for any Mount Vernon Statement. We already have a U.S. Constitution that should guide all Americans. As their statement indicates, the 18 individuals who issued MVS consider themselves "conservatives." While paying some verbal deference to the venerable document, they headlined their pronouncement "Constitutional Conservatism." Why relegate the Constitution to the role of an adjective when all they had to do was reassert the need for a no-holds-barred reinforcement of the Constitution itself?

It is obvious that conservatism is the main love of MVS signers and, possibly, the identical love of the 37,500 supporters who have already endorsed the statement. But conservatism isn't defined. It shifts; it meanders; it contains completely opposing views under its ever-wider umbrella; and it welcomes into its midst individuals who, only a few decades back, would have been properly identified as liberals, or



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internationalists, or both. Conservatism has so many versions that it now has to be qualified as paleo, neo, compassionate, or according to MVS, “constitutional.” Wouldn’t it be supremely more beneficial to our nation to demand strict adherence to an undiluted and unqualified Constitution all by itself?

MVS contains some welcome verbiage. It commendably states, “Through the Constitution, the Founders created an enduring framework of limited government based on the rule of law.” Good! And it mentions the importance of “our founding principles,” the need to “secure national independence,” and the presence of “checks and balances” designed to bar assumption of powers by the “several branches of government.”

It is, however, a bit unnerving to see in MVS a potential cavernous loophole: It seeks a government that “performs its job effectively.” Such wording reminds us of the frequently relied upon reference to Article I, Section 8’s grant of power to “make all laws which shall be necessary and proper.” There we have an absolutely tortured phrase that was never meant to provide an open door for the Congress to do anything it desires. Wanting government to be effective opens the path to unlimited government that, like a runaway freight train, gathers great speed effectively. It needs brakes, and the government needs the brakes contained, but largely ignored, in the Constitution.

Also a bit frightening in this new brand of conservatism is support for “America’s national interest in advancing freedom and opposing tyranny in the world.” Didn’t George Washington advise against such adventurism? Didn’t John Quincy Adams remind us that it is not our nation’s role to go about the world “in search of monsters to destroy”? Is this a sanctioning of undeclared wars and enforcement in other nations of an American-style government that the peoples of those other nations don’t want?

The ultimate bottom line is that there’s absolutely no need for the Constitution-denigrating Mount Vernon Statement. Instead, there’s a need for restoring the Constitution to full force and effect. Let’s get back to what was originally stated unless properly amended, with no interpretation into meaninglessness by black-robed jurists, and no twisting of various clauses into completely opposite meanings by venal politicians.

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