



BY DAVID BOAZ

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Editorial Bad Decade for Freedom

Thank God *that's* over! From 9/11 to the financial crisis, the past decade was a virtually unbroken series of assaults on civil and economic liberty.

It's so bad even the establishment noticed. Congress.org, a website of *Congressional Quarterly*, put together a list of the 10 most notable bills passed by Congress in the past decade and concluded that “a common thread runs through the bills: The government's power and responsibilities have grown in areas as diverse as education, health care and national security.” They listed the Patriot Act, the No Child Left Behind Act, the Medicare prescription drug entitlement, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the Wall Street bailout, and the kitchen-sink spending bill known as “stimulus.” Even that list didn't include such abominations as the McCain-Feingold Act to restrict political speech and the Sarbanes-Oxley Act to impose costly new accounting requirements on companies.

Federal spending in FY 2001 was \$1.863 trillion. After eight years of Republican government, spending in FY 2009 was \$3.522 trillion. The national debt soared during the past decade, with no end in sight.

And all of that before the disastrous “last hundred days” of the Bush administration. We talk a lot about a president's first hundred days—but in barely more than its last hundred days, the Bush administration and the Federal Reserve bailed out Fannie Mae, Freddie Mac, AIG, and the rest of Wall Street; injected a trillion dollars of inflationary credit into the economy; partially nationalized nine major banks, gave \$15 billion to General Motors and Chrysler in defiance of Congress; and laid the groundwork for even more sweeping intrusions by the Obama administration.

On the day of Obama's inauguration, the *Washington Post* wrote, “The federal government itself is a far more potent instrument, in its breadth and depth of command over national life, than it has ever been before.” President Obama never thanked President Bush for the new powers he inherited, but he has certainly used them.

Note how bipartisan all this government growth has been. House and Senate votes on Sarbanes-Oxley and No Child Left Behind were nearly unanimous. A majority of Senate Democrats voted to authorize President Bush to go to war in Iraq, including Senators Joe Biden, Hillary Clinton, and Harry Reid. Both the Clinton and Bush administrations pushed mortgage lenders to make more and more loans to people who weren't likely to pay them back, precipitating the global financial crisis.

It wasn't all bad. A shift in the direction of free markets, property rights, and the rule of law in

China, India, and other developing countries led to impressive increases in standards of living. Even in the United States, capitalism has kept on generating new technology—high-speed and wireless internet, electronic books, GPS, the widespread and instant availability of knowledge, anti-depressants, minimally invasive surgery, and much more. And we continued to make progress in extending the promises of the Declaration of Independence to more people: not only did we elect an African American president, a striking illustration of the erosion of Jim Crow's legacy, but for the first time African Americans became CEOs of Fortune 500 companies, including American Express, Time Warner, and Xerox. More women head large companies than ever before. The Supreme Court struck down sodomy laws, and a few states are establishing equality in marriage law.

Now is a time for action on behalf of liberty. President Obama complained on ABC News, “My critics say that I'm taking over every sector of the economy.” Not everything, so far. Just health care, energy, local schools, financial companies, car makers, executive pay, and subway safety, with a few hints about running newspapers and the internet. Just because the American people wanted George W. Bush and the Republicans out of office in 2008 doesn't mean they wanted all this government. The growing Tea Party movement, the Republican victories in 2009, and the unpopularity of Obama's policies on bailouts, takeovers, and health care reform are testament to that.

It isn't enough to vote for different candidates. These policies must be opposed on principle. We must renew public understanding of individual rights and the limited, constitutional government that protects them. That requires talking forthrightly about fundamental principles—in books and newspapers, online and on television, at seminars and town hall meetings. As Virginia's Declaration of Rights proclaimed in 1776, “All men are by nature equally free and independent and have certain inherent rights . . . namely, the enjoyment of life and liberty, with the means of acquiring and possessing property, and pursuing and obtaining happiness and safety. . . . No free government, or the blessings of liberty, can be preserved to any people but by a firm adherence to justice, moderation, temperance, frugality, and virtue and by frequent recurrence to fundamental principles.”