

America's Decisions

By the Honorable Pete du Pont

I would like to begin my remarks today with a simple reminder: We are meeting in the capital of the greatest country in the history of mankind. Great, yes, because of God's gifts—resources, location, size, but also great because of secular contributions—freedom, enterprise, and markets.

God's gifts and Americans' work have not only served us well, we are reaching the climax of an era that proves just how well one country can serve the whole world's peoples. America's decisions and the actions and results they triggered have been signposts to all of humanity. Not every corner of the earth has followed the lead of the American revolution. Some places and peoples have been slower to reach the turning points than others, but fewer and fewer are missing America's signs about which way to go.

The American example contributed to opportunities in places where for generations, centuries—even millennia—the people were blocked or blind to that golden shaft of light. America has done this not through conquest, but through inspiration.

Today, I want to talk to all of us and most of our fellow citizens who constitute the American majority—we, the people who have helped to move the world forward while making our own land a citadel of opportunity: The majority, who not only cherish personal freedom, but demand individual responsibility. The majority, who acknowledge the importance of security for the relative few in true need, but also value the fundamental principle of market opportunity for all Americans. The majority, who not only exalt America's unique and indispensable diversity, but also protect America's cherished and equally indispensable common links—our families, our communities, and our values.

Of course, I am not describing every American—and certainly not every American political leader. There are many who lack a commitment to individual responsibility, many who abhor the marketplace, resent values, and exude pessimism. That is their choice; but thankfully it has seldom been the American choice.

The American choice has been to make decisions based on our strengths, not our weaknesses. We have made decisions based on the expectations of success, not the fear of failure. And American decision-making is usually marked by our infectious optimism.

Crucial Period. But isn't this an unusual time to be reaffirming America's values? Why is it so important to reemphasize America's success just as our philosophy has triumphed? The answer is that America is embarking on another period of crucial decision-making—crucial to us and crucial to a world that pays increasing attention to us. Will we lower taxes so that the marketplace can restore our prosperity—or will we not? Will we push for increasingly open international markets to fuel the world's prosperity? Will we maintain our defenses and our leadership position in the world's relationships—or will we not?

The Honorable Pete du Pont is a Director at the law firm of Richards, Layton and Finger. He is a former U.S. Representative and former Governor of Delaware.

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Much as it would be reassuring to assume that America's decisions will be correct by divine intervention or inevitable wisdom, neither is true. We must work at it. We do make mistakes and we have made more than our share in the last quarter century. Isn't it ironic that after nearly two hundred years of momentum, and just as the force of our inspiration was reaching its broadest impact, America seems to have faltered—not for a day, not for a few years, but for over a quarter of a century? But now is not the time to dwell on America's past mistakes. Now is the moment to remember the principles of America's majority.

Consistent Voice. Next week in the State of the Union message America will resume making the decisions that will guide us through the decade and into the next century. To clear our minds and firm our step, perhaps a longer perspective will help us understand the vision, the principles, the legacy, and the wishes of the American majority.

Over the years that majority has spoken with a remarkably consistent and conservative voice, regardless of the era, the circumstances, or the leader of its choice.

The American majority inspired President Roosevelt, for example, to make the retirement pension program he launched be a modest and necessary security net. We inspired Roosevelt's welfare efforts to propel individuals back into the work force rather than blocking them from it. Overall, the New Deal kept the share of America's income transferred to the federal government for domestic programs under 10 percent. Would that any President in the last quarter century could say that.

The majority inspired the Marshall Plan, the GI Bill, the containment and ultimate rejection of communism. But most important, the American majority throughout the history of our country has inspired the emergence of an economic engine the likes of which the world had never seen.

As we entered the 1960s, the majority's values and objectives were still dominating American policy, from the expansion of our defenses to the cutting of our taxes. Even Lyndon Johnson, as Michael Barone recently wrote, campaigned in 1964 on tax cuts, a civil rights bill banning racial quotas and, I might add, a desire to keep the federal budget under \$100 billion.

Johnson did not campaign for Great Society programs. His election provided no mandate for them. Nevertheless, 1965 marked not the continuation of an America guided by its majority, but rather the beginning of an America moving to the will of a political minority.

Phantom Mandate. Democrats, giddy with huge majorities in both Houses of Congress, majorities won on a promise to continue America's prosperity, instead launched an attack on that prosperity that continues to this very day. The Great Society was built upon a phantom mandate, false premises, and alien values. Anti-market politicians created a panoply of centrally directed agencies the likes of which America had never seen. Despite the distinctly conservative message of the Nixon-Wallace and Nixon majorities in 1968 and 1972, despite the extraordinary effort of Jimmy Carter to disassociate himself with all that his party built in Washington, it was not until the election of 1980, fifteen years later, that the American majority would again give powerful direction to its government.

But even with that mandate, even with the overwhelming instruction of the elections of 1980, 1984 and 1988, Washington continued to fail us. The majority's mandates were evaded as much as they were respected.

The trouble with the 1980s is not a product of what happened, but what did not happen. The growth of taxes was slowed, that was good. But the growth of taxation was not reversed. That is the problem. The regulatory knot was loosened from the neck of American enterprise, and that was good. But the rope was not removed from our necks. That is the problem. The defense America needed to protect itself and deter its enemies in the 1980s was built, and that is good.

But the defense we need for the 21st Century has not yet been built. That is the problem. The growth of government bureaucracy was slowed, its virus momentarily contained, and that is good, but the growth was not reversed, the virus was not killed. That is the problem.

Resolve of the Meek. Why have we not been more successful? Why did the elected representatives of the 1960s ignore their own platform and launch upon a separate course? Why were the obvious mandates of the 1980s pursued so tentatively? It is not because America's majority lost its principles, its vision, its understanding, or its numbers. No, the problem has been that our leaders have lost the self-confidence that should be so easily maintained by those chosen to implement the majority will. And as their confidence has waned, our influence has eroded.

Too often our leaders look for compromise out of fear of confrontation. Too often they seek to cut our presumed losses rather than to claim the prerogatives of our victories. Too often they show the resolve of the meek despite the power of champions.

Too many of our own leaders simply have not believed that our views are majority views; they do not see themselves as representing a majority at all. They see themselves as loyalists to a minority party, members of minority caucuses, captives of a minority mentality. I suppose it is a forgivable sin for I can tell you from personal experience as a Congressman in the early 1970s how difficult it was for me to remember that I represented the power of a Republican presidential landslide when I watched Carl Albert's election as Speaker of the House by a 2-1 margin. Forgivable, but nevertheless, unacceptable.

Our candidates talk with the people of the majority in the coffee shops and on the plant floors, but too often embrace the policies of the minority at the conference tables of the executive branch and in the halls of Congress. Isn't that our problem?

Pattern of Conduct. Consider the pattern of our leaders' conduct. Prior to 1965, the American majority knew that the creation of opportunity, comfort, security, and prosperity for all of our people could only come with a free and competitive marketplace. Nixon's wage and price controls and Carter's national energy policy are just two examples of the thousand cuts market principles have endured—from Johnson's inauguration to Darman's budget deal.

From the beginning of the civil rights awakening in America, when Martin Luther King Jr. eloquently pled that we be judged "not by the color our skin, but by the content of our character," America's majority understood that the essence of civil rights was equal opportunity in a color blind society. Yet, since the 1970s, America's politicians have repeatedly, if not consistently, acted as if quotas and the aspiration of equal outcomes is the definition of "civil rights."

Prior to 1965, America's majority saw to it that our nondefense federal spending virtually never topped 10 percent of our income. Since then, America's politicians have seen to it that domestic federal spending has never dropped below 10 percent. Today it is nearly 20 percent.

But all is not lost. Our majority is intact if not in complete order. Our principles are in vogue around the world, if not completely in place here at home. Our opportunities, while fewer than they might have been if the last quarter century had been different, are greater than those of any generation ever.

Once again, our political leaders have a magnificent opportunity to implement the wishes of the American majority. Again, America is called upon to issue key decisions which the world has become accustomed to use as signposts. And again, our job, the majority's job, is to make our politicians remember, embrace, and work for the principles that will ensure those decisions are the right ones.

Year of Decisions. How do we do that? Let me suggest some of the things that everyone who is a member of the majority—from this audience to the President—must remember in this year of important decisions.

We must first understand that the economic policies of the minority launched in the past quarter century, and stunningly reenforced in the past few years, must change. If they do not, unemployment will continue to grow, lowering the expectations and diminishing the futures of millions of American families. The increases in government intrusions into the private sector must be reversed. They are placing impossible burdens on our ability to compete, to employ, to make a profit, and to grow. And, of course, the budget deal must be abandoned. Many of us understood that it would accomplish the exact opposite of its goals. Now all of us know, and it is time for a change.

President Bush said in the last campaign that "...expansions don't die from old age. They die from bad policies." It is time to remember what good policies are.

We must remember that taxes must come down, not go up. That is what is best for America. When tax rates were lowered in 1964, the economy grew. When capital gains tax rates were cut in 1979, investment blossomed in spite of double-digit inflation. When tax rates were dramatically reduced starting in 1982, the longest peacetime expansion in the history of our country followed. Those were policies and outcomes that were good for America—and good signposts for the world.

We must remember that effective government encourages innovation, technology, and entrepreneurship in the marketplace. That is what is best for America. Regulation pursued as part of an anti-market, anti-growth agenda squeezes the breath from our economy. The imposition of draconian cures for ills that range from the modest to the imaginary serves the sole purpose of shrinking the economic pie—just the opposite of what is good for America—and the world.

Definition of Freedom. We must remember that the definition of freedom is the ability to make choices and the economic power to make those choices meaningful. Freedom is the power to choose a school, a health care option, a job, a dream. Quotas and preferences rob people of power, cheat them of their chance, and devalue the content of our character. Personal empowerment is what is best for citizens of America and people everywhere.

We must remember that our freedom is still a product of our willingness to be strong, not our desire to be peaceful. Strength is what is best for America and the world.

We must remember that our markets can no more end at our shores than our role in the world can end there. Protectionism and subsidies—abroad and at home—cost jobs and opportunities, and raise the cost of living for all. Global trade and free markets are what is best for America and for everyone.

We must remember that freedom is the prerequisite to opportunity everywhere in the world. America's minority might stand mute when the freedom comes to nations like Lithuania and the desire for freedom screams from nations like China. But silence is not the product of the principles of the majority. A voice on freedom's side is what is best for America.

Traditional Values. Finally, we must remember that traditional values and traditional families were the core of America's successful past and are essential to a prosperous future. A welfare system that denigrates work, a popular culture that disparages the two parent family and shuns individual responsibility are not good for America. The values of the majority are.

My friends, I think we all now know that 1980 was a crucially important year in American history. But we do not yet know its permanent significance. Was it the beginning of the restoration

of the will of the American majority? Or was it the beginning of the last hurrah for the principles, values, and policies that have guided America to greatness? We will learn a great deal about the answers to those questions in the next few weeks and months. Let us pray that we like what we learn. But more important, let us recommit ourselves to the task of assuring that our politicians come to understand with crystal clarity the American majority and the principles for which it stands.

I was talking to Fred Smith this week and he put it just right: The principles of the majority, he said, might best be called "The American Alternative." Isn't it ironic that as we have watched "The American Alternative" blossom around the world, we must still struggle to keep it in flower here at home?

Clear Signposts. So we enter one of the great decision times—a time of change, opportunity, and challenge. Yet another time like the early thirties with the world in depression, like the early Forties with the world at war, like the Fifties when expanding communism was contained, and like the Eighties when opportunity returned to America and the world's oppressors were diminished. America's decisions created signposts of unmistakable clarity at those moments because America's majority worked its will. Let us hope that we will work our will again.

