

A Heritage of Liberty

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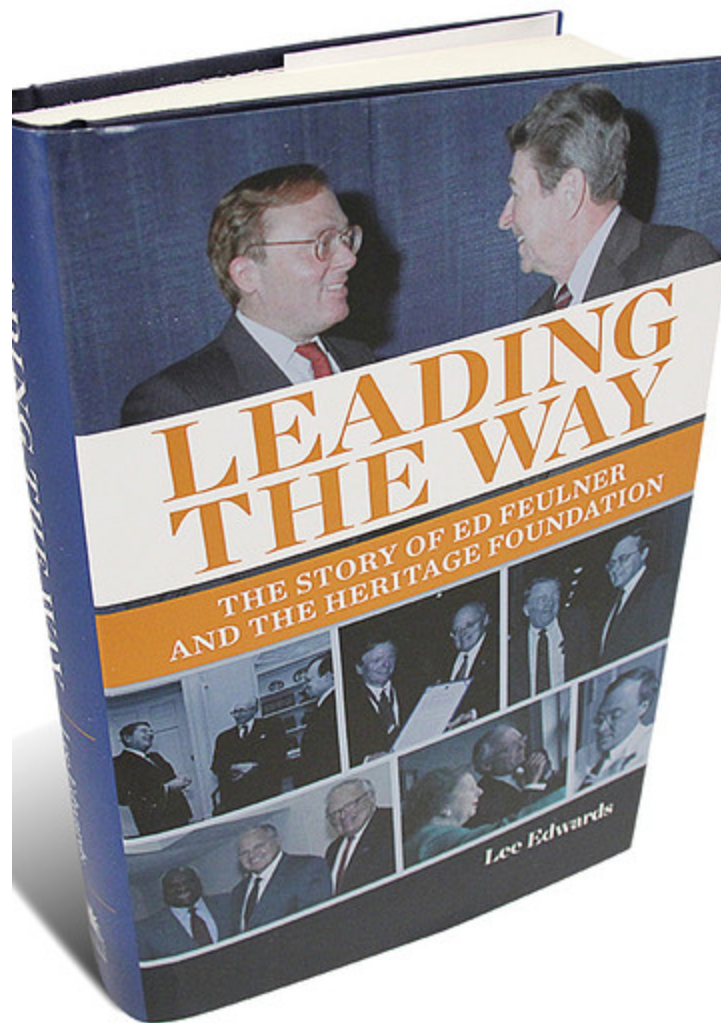
Both the McCain and Romney campaigns failed to state conservative principles clearly and translate them into attractive public policies. These were hardly the only factors that allowed Barack Obama to claim a historic victory in 2008 and to win re-election in 2012. Even so, the perception that recent Republican presidential nominees have been short on ideas for bettering the lot of average Americans has been profoundly damaging to conservatism.

Today's quest to renew conservatism is reminiscent of the early 1970s. Forty years ago, the right was dismayed by Richard Nixon's domestic policies, which departed from fundamental conservative principles, and embarrassed by the criminality and clumsy coverup of Watergate. Gerald Ford was as underwhelming as Jimmy Carter was sanctimonious and incompetent. The right also lacked a national standard-bearer; the establishment press, with the exception of The Wall Street Journal editorial pages, was comfortably left-liberal. Then, as now, universities generally excluded conservative ideas and those who studied them.

By the time Ronald Reagan took office in 1981, the Heritage Foundation, established in 1973 during a dark hour for conservatism, was ready to remake conservative public policy by returning to conservative principles. With its ability to respond promptly and to think for the long term, Heritage proved the premier ideas shop and policy factory for the Reagan Revolution and has remained a powerful source of ideas and inspiration to the movement. In "Leading the Way: The Story of Ed Feulner and the Heritage Foundation," Lee Edwards serves up an engaging account of the founding and flourishing of this "new kind of Washington think tank." The author, the distinguished fellow in conservative thought at Heritage, also provides a sober history of conservatism in America from Barry Goldwater's drubbing in 1964 to Reagan's ascendance in the 1980s to the soul-searching following Mitt Romney's loss last November.

In 1971, Mr. Feulner was 30 years old and working as an assistant to Rep. Phil Crane of Illinois. He and 28-year-old Paul Weyrich, then press secretary to Sen. Gordon Allott of Colorado, "conceived the idea of a conservative think tank that would concentrate on providing timely, concise, reliable analysis to members of Congress and their staff," Mr. Edwards writes. Rather than merely rejecting progressive programs, the institution would generate well-thought out "conservative initiatives." The culmination of the foundation's early work in the 1970s was "Mandate for Leadership: Policy Management in a Conservative

Administration," a 1,093-page tome drawing on 250 experts and proposing reforms in all aspects of government, which Heritage presented to the Reagan transition team in November 1980, barely a week after the Gipper defeated Carter.



For 40 years, as Mr. Edwards gracefully shows, Heritage has provided arguments and evidence to support welfare reform, partial privatization of Social Security, market-based health-care reform, tuition tax credits, education vouchers, inner-city enterprise zones, free trade, missile defense and much more. Heritage scholars have been at the forefront of those contending that welfare programs create a culture of dependency; that the U.S. should develop "military and peaceful uses of space," including a space-based missile-defense system; and that the U.S. must pursue enhanced trade relations with Asia.

Mr. Feulner, who served as Heritage president from 1977 until his retirement last year, was a vital force behind all of this, and he is at the heart of Mr. Edwards's narrative. Edwin John Feulner Jr. was born in 1941 in Evergreen Park, a small suburb southwest of Chicago, to devout Roman Catholic parents of German-American descent. At Regis University in Denver, he discovered political philosophy and a conservatism that stressed "patriotism, free

enterprise, and religious faith." From Russell Kirk's "The Conservative Mind" (1953), he learned about the defining tenets of social conservatism. According to Mr. Edwards, "Feulner liked Kirk's inclusion of divine intent and the intimate connection between private property and freedom—tenets of traditional conservatism and libertarianism." From F.A. Hayek's "The Road to Serfdom" (1944), Mr. Feulner learned about the menace to individual liberty posed by collectivism.

Just as Mr. Feulner was impressed by the attention that social conservative Kirk gave to freedom and private property, so too he took careful note of libertarian Hayek's insistence that free peoples and free markets depend on citizens' virtue. Both traditionalism and libertarianism, he saw, placed a premium on government that, while limited under law, was neither weak nor neutral but which energetically protected freedom and encouraged competition. This mutual dependence of social conservatism and limited government later became a cornerstone of the Heritage ethos. By the time he was named president of Heritage in 1977, Mr. Feulner had completed stints at the Center for Strategic Studies, the House of Representatives and the Pentagon, and he was firmly grounded in the defining ideas of postwar American conservatism.

That doesn't mean Heritage has been without missteps, including during Mr. Feulner's tenure: ObamaCare's individual mandate has intellectual roots in a 1989 Heritage proposal, though the foundation ultimately rejected the idea on constitutional and practical grounds. Moreover, Heritage Action, the think-tank's legislative-advocacy arm founded in 2010, has thrust it into electoral politics in a way that complicates the independence of its policy ideas. Heritage's new report on immigration reform, released during the tenure of Mr. Feulner's successor, former South Carolina Sen. Jim DeMint, has also proved problematic. Examining the fiscal costs of immigration reform is surely worthwhile. Yet, in opposing a pathway to citizenship, the report fails to take into account the political and moral costs of condemning some 11 million illegal immigrants to the shadows. Prudent reform weighs both economic consequences as well as political considerations, the formation of democratic majorities, and justice. Heritage's work has been and will remain at its best when it's grounded in the full range of principles on which the conservation of liberty depends.

Mr. Berkowitz is a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution. His new book is "Constitutional Conservatism: Liberty, Self-Government, and Political Moderation."