



The Patriot's Toolbox: Policy Ideas From a Free Market Perspective

by John Hendrickson

The emergence of the Tea Party movement in response to the legislative agenda of President Barack Obama and Democrats in Congress has resulted in a thirst for knowledge on the Constitution and sound public policy solutions. The “Great Recession” with 9.8 percent unemployment, the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (health-care reform), the economic “stimulus,” and out-of-control government spending have resurrected a much-needed debate over the role of government and how government should promote economic growth. “Far more than the Beltway Right, the Tea Party is in tune with the heart of America — not only on taxes, spending and Obamacare, but on social, cultural, and moral issues,” noted columnist Patrick J. Buchanan.¹ Americans are concerned about the direction the nation is moving and filled with anxiety over the major problems that are confronting the nation.

The emergence of the Tea Party has provided an opportunity for a renewal of civic education and understanding the importance of constitutional limited government. A number of policy organizations, or think-tanks, such as Public Interest Institute, The Heritage Foundation, Cato Institute, among others are playing a vital role in helping concerned citizens understand policy issues, the Constitution, and our American heritage. The Heartland Institute has recently published the book *The Patriot's Toolbox: Eighty Principles for Restoring our Freedom and Prosperity*, which is a free-market examination of several core areas of public policy that citizens and policymakers should be familiar with. This “book is offered as a guide to public policy for patriot-activists in the Tea Party movement as well as for candidates for public office, incumbent office holders, civic and business leaders, and journalists assigned to cover the movement.”²

The Patriot's Toolbox covers several core areas of public policy including health care, education, privatization, business climate, state fiscal policy, energy and environment, among other policy areas. Each chapter is authored by a policy expert or experts in that particular field and the chapters provide a sound overview of policy solutions and ideas from a free-market perspective. Some of the chapters are from The Heartland Institute's *Legislative Principles* series, which is a useful primer on policy issues. The book is not meant to be an exhaustive treatment of all of the policy issues addressed, but rather as a resource that guides individuals through explaining complex policy problems and offering solutions based upon free-market ideas. The text is reader friendly and each chapter offers additional resources for people who are interested in learning more, and, as the title suggests, this is a “toolbox” for concerned citizens and policymakers who are engaged in the current policy debates.

In regard to health-care reform, *The Patriot's Toolbox* provides an overview of this complex policy issue and offers free-market solutions. Some of the health-care reforms addressed include more competition in the health-care market, expansion of Health Savings Accounts (HSAs),

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legal reforms, promoting entrepreneurship in health care, among others. In regard to education reform, *The Patriot's Toolbox* encourages more school-choice reforms that will allow parents to have a greater say in deciding which school their children will attend, and greater competition in education, which will not only save taxpayers money, but will improve the overall quality of education. Other reforms include vouchers and having money follow each student. Policies of school choice are proving that competition improves education for students as well as teacher performance.

With the economy and government spending (at all levels of government) being the top concern as seen by the November 2010 midterm elections, citizens are increasingly concerned about the economic and fiscal health of their respective community, state, and federal governments. In addition, citizens, business leaders, and policymakers are looking for sound economic solutions to create jobs and restore economic prosperity. *The Patriot's Toolbox* offers economic solutions that have proven historically to work. Some of the examples include: reducing the tax burden across-the-board, reducing regulations, privatization, promoting or preserving Right to Work laws, among others. A high tax burden on businesses or individuals will destroy incentives to invest, save, work, and to take entrepreneurial risks. On the national level, for example, failure to extend the Bush tax cuts will result in a massive tax increase that will be detrimental to the national economy.

Fiscal policy must also be reformed if government spending is going to be reduced and controlled. In regard to state fiscal policy, *The Patriot's Toolbox* recommends that Legislatures keep taxes low, which will provide incentive for business growth, privatize services, enact Tax and Expenditure limitations (TEL), among others. A TEL will limit "the growth of taxes or spending to the sum of inflation and population growth, so that government grows no faster than the private sector."³ Reviving the economy can only come from reducing taxes and solving the fiscal crisis at the state and national levels, which will require cuts in government spending.

The Heartland Institute has contributed a timely free-market resource that will be used by many in the crucial fight over policy and philosophy. This policy primer will be used on the frontlines by citizens, business leaders, and policymakers to promote free-market solutions that are so desperately needed to return the nation back to constitutional principles.

Endnotes

¹Patrick J. Buchanan, "The Tea Party's Winning Hand," *The American Cause*, November 16, 2010, <<http://www.theamericancause.org/index.php?mact=News,cntnt01,detail,0&cntnt01articleid=698&cntnt01origid=26&cntnt01returnid=29>> (November 29, 2010).

²Joseph L. Bast and Herbert J. Walberg, "Preface," in *The Patriot's Toolbox: Eighty Principles for Restoring our Freedom and Prosperity*, The Heartland Institute, Chicago, Illinois, 2010, p. v.

³*The Patriot's Toolbox*, p. 220.

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