

# A Question of Competence

by Alfred S. Regnery

**T**O ANY POLITICIAN—especially a president—the most damaging criticism, at least apart from a seamy ethical problem, is incompetence. People just like to think those they elect are capable of getting the job done, and if they cannot, they're unlikely to be rehired.

Maybe even ethics takes second place. I recall Louisiana Gov. Edwin Edwards's famous remark that he could get caught in bed with a live boy or a dead girl and still get reelected. Why? Because Louisianans thought that as crooked as the governor was—and he did eventually go to jail—at least he could get the people's business done. Bill Clinton, involved in one scandal after another, left office with his approval ratings in the stratosphere. People may not have liked what he did, but incompetence was rarely at the top of the complaint list. But look at poor old George W. Bush. His scandal-free tenure was plagued by a sense of incompetence, from Katrina to the inability to end the Iraq war to the recession—none of which were really his fault, but he sure paid the price.

Barack Obama was elected on the basis of his personal attraction, his ability to give a convincing speech, and by persuading voters that he was going to be, somehow, different. People continue to tell the pollsters they want him to succeed and they continue to like his persona—after all, that's what they bought. Maybe the attitude is a bit like that of the fellow who buys an expensive new car and soon realizes he doesn't like it as much as he thought he would. But he's not about to admit that to his friends, not after telling them how much he loved it.

Now comes a headline, "Worries grow that Barack Obama & Co. have a competence problem," and one has to wonder if what most on the right have suspected all along may be seeping through the media fog surrounding the president. It is no secret that the stakes for Obama are indeed high, and the problems he faces acute. Americans want these problems—economic problems—solved. And most, at least those who have been around a while, know from experience that when economic problems arise, they can be solved.

As we approach the end of the proverbial first 100 days we don't have to look far to find lots of

incompetence. Most appointive positions in the administration remain unfilled, and many nominees have withdrawn because of ethical and tax problems. We find inconsistent policies and answers on topic after topic. We find an economy that has not responded to the most massive stimulus plan in history, and we find Obamaites desperately trying to cover their hineys for any involvement in, among others, the AIG bonus scandal, making themselves and the administration look more amateurish with each changing answer. And despite Obama's high approval ratings, pollsters are learning that a majority of Americans want less government and fewer services by a larger margin than any time since 2003. A startling 82 percent of Americans told the Gallup poll in late March that they were worried about growing deficits, and nearly as many were worried about the rapid growth of government.

But not only are we getting bigger and bigger government. We are faced with a smug know-it-all who one would think is the world's leading expert on everything from health care to the financial sector to running General Motors to telling the rest of the world how to function. As convincing as he may sound, he plays a dangerous game. When anything on his list starts going haywire—which no doubt it will—voters will start to question his competence.

We feature this month an enlightening piece on the president's most visible, and arguably most incompetent, cabinet member—the one whose advice to the president has helped to vaporize the accumulated wealth of the United States (not to mention yours, dear reader), the one who has set the stage for an ongoing economic meltdown, and the one who has been described as the worst treasury secretary in history. It may be too early to call him incompetent—maybe too clever by half would be more accurate. But the too-clever-by-half folks have a way of getting burned in the end. The president may not need much help establishing his own incompetence, but my guess is that history will tell us he got plenty from Mr. Geithner. ❁

**Alfred S. Regnery** is publisher of *The American Spectator*.

---

★

# “A must-read for donors to the Conservative Movement”

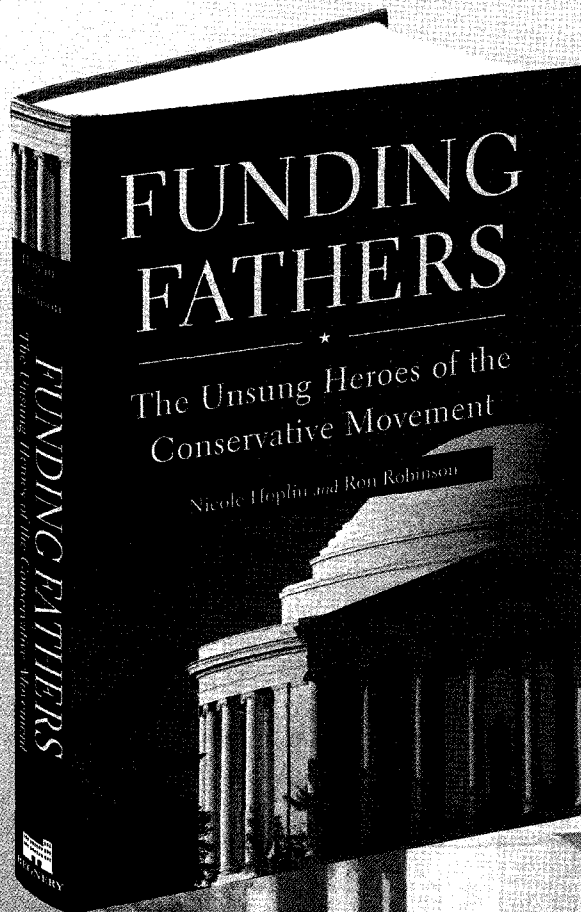
—75<sup>th</sup> U.S. Attorney General Edwin Meese III

---

★

Contained in the pages of this book by Young America's Foundation's Nicole Hoplin and Ron Robinson are the stories that have rarely been told by the media... They are the stories of the vibrant lives of people who stood behind some of the Conservative Movement's brightest moments, and who received little recognition or gratitude from the Movement or the country they shaped over the years. More importantly, they are stories of how the most significant books, institutions, and leaders came to be...

Order  
Your Copy  
Today!



“The mainstream press can be held responsible for one of three actions when it comes to stories (or lack thereof) about conservative philanthropy. It either:

- (a) ignores a great gift given altogether,
- (b) vilifies the gift and its significance, or
- (c) misinterprets and misreports the gift in a way a donor would not intend for it to be remembered.

If conservatives rely solely on the media for gift-giving reinforcement, they will seldom take the steps necessary to propel the Movement forward...”

*Purchase Funding Fathers today—essential reading for those who want to know the inside story of the Conservative Movement and learn about its largely unheralded heroes.*

Available online, in bookstores  
everywhere, or at [www.Regnery.com](http://www.Regnery.com).

 Since 1947  
**REGNERY  
PUBLISHING, INC.**  
An Eagle Publishing Company • Washington, DC  
[www.regnery.com](http://www.regnery.com)

# It's Up to Us

by Mark Sanford

**W**HEN ASKED TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE *Spectator's* ongoing "Freedom Watch," series, I welcomed the opportunity, as I don't think those of us involved in the political scene spend enough time talking about freedom, beyond the sound bites and rallies and speeches that pass for today's political theater.

I say this because I believe there is a battle taking place for the future of America, a battle whose lines have been drawn with government on the one hand and liberty, the hallmark of the American experiment, on the other. It's a battle those of us aligned with liberty are in danger of losing—although our banner still indeed waves.

We live in an era in which conservatives have not effectively outlined the proper and limited role of government, and as a direct consequence of our failures, more and more of our citizens are turning to an ever-encroaching government in times of crisis. Yet to allow the balance of power in this nation to continue to shift further and further toward government and thus further and further from liberty is to surrender the very thing that makes America so historically unique.

We must push back against this in three ways.

First, we should recognize that what Charles Murray calls our "cultural capital" is in peril. In a recent address to the American Enterprise Institute, Murray credited much of America's greatness to "the cultural capital generated by the system that the Founders laid down, a system that says people must be free to live life as they see fit and to be responsible for the consequences of their actions." Yet current events reveal us to be in a very different situation—one in which "chosen" businesses receive bailouts and in which the Supreme Court rules that a government can seize private property because some bureaucracy thinks a shopping mall is in the best interests of a town. The stark reality is that we're in severe danger of losing what our nation's Founders risked their lives and sacred honor to create.

Second, we need to realize that this is more than just a philosophical problem. We've had a front-row

seat to its practical implications over the last six months, as the financial crisis has given way to the most significant expansion of government in generations. And now, as outlined in his budget, our ambitious new president is poised to grow the federal government into the central force in American health care, education, and energy—accepting deficits stretching well into the trillions of dollars to do so.

Lastly, we cannot forget that each of us can make a difference. No matter how clichéd that may sound, the fact is our Founders created a nation centered on the simple notion that the individual was the sole repository of political power. This idea, that the individual and not the government or the ruling elites could alone determine the course of a nation, was in practical terms entirely new. And how powerful an idea it has proven to be.

It's that notion, for instance, that enabled a seamstress named Rosa Parks, riding the Cleveland Avenue bus line and living to that point a normal, unremarkable life, to change the course of history by having the courage to say "No" regardless of the consequences. And it's the same notion that allowed a humble backwoods lawyer with no formal education named Abraham Lincoln to rise to the pinnacle of this nation, right our greatest wrong, and ultimately preserve our Union.

My overarching point is this: every one of us has great power in determining where we go next as a civilization, and with that great power comes an equally great responsibility. It is up to each of us to do in our time what our conservative forebears did in theirs, that being whatever is in our power to halt the relentless drive of government to encroach on our liberty.

Ronald Reagan once remarked of freedom that it "is a fragile thing and is never more than one generation away from extinction." As conservatives, and more importantly as Americans, our ultimate aim can be stated simply: to ensure that ours is not the generation that lets freedom die. ❁

**Mark Sanford** is the governor of South Carolina.