

Governor Rick Perry's Views on Major Issues

By Robert Genetski

Presidential candidate Rick Perry's book *Fed Up* (Little, Brown and Company. Kindle Edition), provides extensive, detailed views of his core beliefs. There is no mincing of words. Neither is there the slicing and dicing of nuances leaving you to wonder where he stands on major issues.

Perry's objective in writing the book is "to help foster a nationwide conversation states about the proper role of government." His ultimate goal is to shift power from the federal government to the state and local governments. By doing so, Perry hopes to restore the freedom and liberty that has made America the greatest and most prosperous nation in the world.

Based on the statements in his book, Governor Perry's views represent the antithesis of President Obama's views. If Perry were to become the Republican Presidential candidate, the public would be presented with the clearest choice imaginable regarding the nation's future policy direction.

Perry documents how the concentration of power in the federal government has undermined both our freedom and prosperity. He also outlines the major changes necessary to restore our nation to its position as the best performing economy in the world.

I urge everyone to read the entire book for themselves. The following are some salient topics with quotes providing a cursory insight to Perry's views.

America's Exceptionalism

Unlike President Obama, who believes every country is exceptional, Governor Perry states:

...America is unique in its greatness. I believe that it is exceptional, and has been ever since its founding, because of its reliance on and belief in the individual, in liberty, in equal justice under law, in God, in a limited constitutional government, and in the willingness of its people to risk their lives in defense of those things around the world.
(p.7)

Shifting Power from the Federal Government to the States

Perry provides powerful arguments for the importance shifting power from Washington:

We can all still be proud Americans while acknowledging that we simply do not agree on many fundamental issues. We are a diverse people—incapable of being governed from a faraway capital by people who do not share our values. Recognizing this fact is critical to the preservation of a free state. Federalism enables us to live united as a nation, with a federal government that is focused on our national security and that has specific enumerated powers, while we live in states with like-minded people who share our values and beliefs. Crucial to understanding federalism in modern-day America is the concept of mobility, or "the ability to vote with your feet." If you don't support the death penalty and citizens packing a pistol, don't come to Texas. If you don't like medicinal marijuana and gay marriage, don't move to California. (p. 13)

To further his case for shifting power from Washington to the states Perry quotes Thomas Jefferson, *“Were not this great country already divided into states, that division must be made, that each might do for itself what concerns itself directly, and what it can so much better do than a distant authority.”*

Perry raises important questions, “Why do states matter? ... Why establish a boundary between Virginia and Maryland or between Texas and Oklahoma? ... Why empower states instead of having a single, powerful national government?”

His answer is:

Americans want to live free. They want to gather together with people of common beliefs and goals to establish communities in which they can prosper. They do not want to be told how to live their lives. They certainly don't want some faraway bureaucrat, judge, or representative of a different community to tell them how to live. That liberty has been the essence of America ever since the colonists came here. (pp. 17-18)

The Founders gave us a federal system of government that, if respected, allows people of varying beliefs to live together united as Americans. We agree that there are certain things we must do together as Americans to be a strong nation—the providing of national defense and security being first and foremost—but most problems get better solutions when they are solved at the local level. And in doing so, we can tailor those solutions to our own values and perspectives rather than trying to create national one-size-fits-all policies. I would no more consider living in Massachusetts than I suspect a great number of folks from Massachusetts would like to live in Texas. (p.26)

Ultimately, as long as we avoid a one-size-fits-all federal government solution, no American need ever be forced into a mold that does not fit. In a nation of a single rule of law, a frustrated citizen would have no options and would be forced to lead his life under laws he found oppressive. Under federalism, however, this citizen has the opportunity to exercise his liberty by moving to a state where his preferences are better matched. If he prefers not to pay any state income tax whatsoever, for example, he has the option of moving to Alaska, Florida, Nevada, South Dakota, Texas, Washington, or Wyoming. This mobility puts competitive pressure on states. Policies that undermine progress and the well-being of a state's citizens will not be long-lived. State politicians have an incentive to identify and satisfy resident preferences so that dissatisfied citizens do not leave, taking their tax dollars with them. (p.28)

... Massachusetts is free to experiment with state-run health care. If federalism is respected, the people of Massachusetts are free to try it while the rest of the nation sits back and watches to see if they have any success, and whether any success they do have is worth the price of losing liberty to get it. (p.31)

With respect to the use of states' rights to justify racial discrimination, Perry notes:

...many of our ancestors and forebears ignored the words and spirit of the Declaration of Independence and denied basic liberties and humanity to certain people solely because of the color of their skin. These were inexcusable chapters in American history—particularly for the southern states most responsible....(p. 33)

Perry explains how it took almost a century for civil rights guaranteed by the 13th, 14th and 15th Amendments to the Constitution.

But it is important to note that, for all the bluster leading up to and during the civil rights movement by some about states' rights, it was the realization of the purpose and intent of those constitutional amendments—a process that both respected federalism and the role of the federal government to use explicit constitutional authority to protect fundamental individual rights—that led to equal rights for all. And it is also important that those of us who are committed to liberty through federalism not be held hostage because some people were misguided or evil in their perpetuation of the scourge of racism in the name of states' rights. As talk-radio host and lawyer Mark Levin described it in *Liberty and Tyranny*:

For the Conservative, the lesson comes back to man's imperfection. Even good men are capable of bad things. The disgrace of slavery is a disgrace of the human condition—as is all tyranny. Man's institutions, like man himself, are imperfect. They can be used for good or bad, and they have been used for both. Therefore, diffusing authority among many imperfect men—by enumerating federal power, separating power within the federal government, and sharing power with the states—isolates and limits tyranny. Had slavery been affirmed in the Constitution and urged on all states, who knows when and how it would have been abolished. (p. 34)

Perspectives on Economic Issues

Other sections of Perry's book show a detailed understanding of historical developments few politicians appear to recognize. Perry clearly explains the failure of Roosevelt's New Deal, in which unemployment remained close to 20% in 1939. He also relates the famous quote from Henry Morgenthau, Jr., FDR's longtime friend and treasury secretary, who told Democrats on the Ways and Means Committee in May 1939:

We have tried spending money. We are spending more than we have ever spent before and it does not work. And I have just one interest... I want to see this country prosperous. I want to see people get a job. I want to see people get enough to eat. We have never made good on our promises.... I say after eight years of this administration we have just as much unemployment as when we started.... And an enormous debt to boot! (p.48)

Too many politicians rant and rave mindlessly about the nation's debt. Perry is far more perceptive in stating that:

...debt in and of itself is not necessarily a problem. Responsibly used and managed, borrowed money is a useful tool. But the financial obligations our country is confronting are anything but manageable, and we may well be facing a "perfect storm" of too much debt, low-growth economic policies, rising interest rates, and the final realization of the true cost of the welfare state. (p. 56)

He is also on firm ground in discussing the Social Security Trust Fund. His conclusions are heads and shoulders above either Al Gore's mythical "lock box" or those of a certain Nobel Prize winning economist. Perry writes:

...This trust fund is an elaborate illusion cooked up by government magicians. Social Security is a pay-as-you-go system, meaning that current payroll taxes are used to fund benefits. Any extra revenues have funded general government obligations for generations in return for IOUs from the U.S. Treasury. Thus, it is a ruse for politicians to tell us not to worry, because there's \$2.4 trillion in the Social Security Trust Fund. While it is true that there is an accumulated accounting surplus in this amount, the surplus exists only in a "bookkeeping sense," as the Office of Management and Budget admitted in 2000. (p. 60)

Social Security

In a section of the book that will no doubt lead to attacks from both Republicans and Democrats, the Governor presents the truth about Social Security:

By any measure, Social Security is a failure. As author Jim Powell points out in FDR's Folly, one pro-FDR historian justified Social Security not on its merits but as an important "symbolic gesture to demonstrate that Roosevelt's heart was in the right place." This sounds a lot like justifying the current administration's policies because well-meaning politicians want to provide "hope." Now, if you say Social Security is a failure, as I have just done, you will inherit the wind of political scorn. Seniors might think you want to cut the benefits they have paid for. Politicians will seek to take advantage, stirring up fear about benefits that will be lost if you elect another "heartless Republican." ... We are told that no politician has the courage to raise these issues, even if avoiding them puts us on the fast track to financial ruin. But by remaining quiet, politicians are really saying they think the American people won't understand it if we share the grim details of our financial future, and that voters will simply kill—or vote against—the messenger in order to continue to receive an underfunded benefit that robbed them of the tens of thousands of dollars they should have made. (p. 62)

Given the failure of the current Social Security system, Perry provides a general outline of what he would like to see happen:

I see an entitlement system that has been totally and honestly revamped—where \$106 trillion in unfunded liabilities are met with innovation, decentralization, and real solutions rather than false promises. There will be a retirement safety net that is no longer set up like an illegal Ponzi scheme, but rather will allow individuals to own and control their own retirement. There will be a health care safety net that is not built on the promise of what government can provide for the people, but on what individuals can accomplish together over our lifetime through work, savings, charity—and by spreading risk out through insurance policies. (p.171)

Agricultural Subsidies

Even though he was a farmer, Perry clearly see no need for farm subsidies:

This culture of reckless spending is exemplified by another legacy of the New Deal. Agriculture spending, or farm subsidies, is designed to continue the longstanding tradition of farming in America that so many of us cherish. Farming was my life, and I believe our nation is stronger because of the American farmer. But the constant stream of subsidies coming out of Washington, again with good intentions, seriously undermines the small farmer while costing taxpayers billions of dollars. (p.67)

But if Congress would just allow the market to work, American consumers would undoubtedly be much better off. New Zealand provides an example. The country faced a financial crisis in the early 1980s and was forced to scale back its government. They began by deregulating the farming industry and removed agricultural subsidies. It has been a fantastic success. New Zealand's farmers are now more productive and more efficient in their land use, and the agricultural sector has become an even stronger part of the country's overall economy. But instead of letting American farmers put their ingenuity to work in the market, Washington perpetuates an illogical program that began as a temporary measure in the New Deal. (pp. 68-69)

Health Care

No one wants any American to go without the health care he or she needs. But that's not what this debate is all about. It's about control. And as bad as the situation with Medicare and Medicaid is, Obamacare represents an enormous and dangerous step closer to the socialist abyss. (p. 85)

...the premise of Obamacare is that our health is not our responsibility but the public's. At its core, Obamacare represents the closest this country has ever come to outright socialism. (p.79)

Environmental Concerns

Texas has made great strides in fighting air pollution while absorbing millions more people and supporting the most dynamic economy in the country. It isn't necessary to bludgeon job creators with hefty fines and penalties in order to make progress; it is better to work with business and harness American innovation—the same innovation that drives our economic success—in the realm of pollution control. (p.90)

Take a look at Texas. Most people—even Texans—have no idea that Texas established water and air pollution programs before Congress passed federal clean water and air legislation.¹⁸ (p.156)

Financial Crisis of 2008

Fundamentally, the financial crisis of 2008 was the product of a number of forces. Significant among them were the federal government's mandate that banks provide a certain number of loans, that Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac existed to purchase those loans (thereby hedging the banks' risk and encouraging banks to make loans that a free market would never sustain), and the Federal Reserve's monetary policy of extremely low interest rates over a long period of time. These government interventions in the free market led to a bubble that eventually burst.

To solve this free-market failure, though, Washington Democrats decided that we needed more government intervention. How much more? A lot, it turns out. The new law is estimated to require at least 243 new formal rule makings by 11 different federal agencies.⁶¹ Counting new rule makings authorized by the law, in addition to the minimum of 243 that are mandated, the total could actually be 533.⁶² The new law has thus been described by the Wall Street Journal as "30 times more complicated than Sarbanes-Oxley," the burdens of which, despite only requiring 16 new regulations, have been extremely harmful to the competitiveness of American businesses. (pp. 92-93)

Constitutional Law

The Supreme Court—filled with nine unelected and unaccountable judges appointed to the bench for life—long ago wrested away from the people the power to decide what is right and what is wrong and, at the most fundamental level, how we should live our lives. Nothing could be more offensive to the concept of liberty and the principle of federalism. (pp. 94-95)

The operative variable is nothing more than the whim of the Court, which depends on the prevailing winds of the day, often for a single judge. As I have shown, there has been one constant theme, win or lose—the fact that many decisions are slim 5–4 majorities. Indeed, the infamous swing vote on the Court, such as Justice Kennedy or, formerly, Justice O’Connor, has an incomprehensible amount of power. And for that reason, the difference between living free and not living free can come down to the whim of one justice. (p.113)

Political Parties

While the modern Democrat is unabashedly committed to expanding the federal government and willing to wake up every day fighting to do it, the average Republican too often shows up to the fight seeking something “less bad” than what the Democrat wants. That’s not a fight, it’s a concession. Tomorrow will come and the Democrat will be on the battlefield again, expecting the Republican to once again capitulate—and, unfortunately, he would be correct.

Republicans today prefer to use government to achieve their own preferred, supposedly conservative, policy goals and give lip service to the idea of limiting it overall. The idea seems to be that if the federal government is increased less than the Democrats want, then Republicans have done the best they can. As any good psychologist will tell you, playing not to lose is very different from playing to win, and for too many years now, that is precisely what even our most “conservative” Republicans have been doing. The result is a one-sided fight. (p.135)

Proper Role of the Federal Government

Now, sometimes, I think people suppose that those of us who believe in a limited central government do not believe the federal government should do anything at all. That’s not true. We simply want the federal government’s involvement in our lives to be constitutional, paid for, effective, and as minimal as possible. (p.174)

When the federal government oversteps its authority, states should tell Washington that they will not be complicit in enforcing laws with which they do not agree. Again, the best example is an issue I don’t even agree with—the partial legalization of marijuana. Californians clearly want some level of legalized marijuana, be it for medicinal use or otherwise. The federal government is telling them they cannot. But states are not bound to enforce federal law and the federal government cannot commandeer state resources and require them to enforce it. So good luck to the federal government if it wants to enforce every law on its books without the help of state and local law enforcement. When the federal government oversteps its bounds, states should think hard about whether a single state resource should be committed to carry out the intrusive policy in question. (p.177)

Basic Reforms

First, we must restrict federal spending. Rampant and wasteful spending in Washington is an affront to both freedom and federalism. The most important thing we could do is amend the Constitution—now—to restrict federal spending. There are generally thought to be two options: the traditional “balanced budget amendment” or a straightforward “spending limit amendment,” either of which would be a significant improvement. I prefer the latter. It is imperative that we establish a constitutional requirement that the federal government live within its means like states and most American households must do—but I don’t want the Washington establishment to hide behind tax increases to “balance” the budget. Let’s use the people’s document—the Constitution—to put an actual spending limit in place to control the beast in Washington. (p. 180-181)

Second, we should restrict the unlimited source of revenue that the federal government has used to grow beyond its constitutionally prescribed powers. One option would be to totally scrap the current tax code in favor of a flat tax, and thereby make taxation much simpler, easier to follow, and harder to manipulate. Another option would be to repeal the Sixteenth Amendment to the Constitution (providing the power for the income tax) altogether, and then pursue an alternative model of taxation such as a national sales tax or the Fair Tax. (p.182)

Solving Problems

The people know that it isn’t a powerful federal government that solves problems in their lives, but rather it is the people themselves. It is the people who create jobs, it is the people who cure diseases and invent new ways to solve complex problems, it is the people who take care of their families, it is the people who volunteer time and give money to charity, and it is the people who make the country work. (p.184)

Governor Perry has faith in the power of individuals and free markets to solve the nation’s problems. His detailed analysis of both our problems and solutions represents a refreshing and constructive approach to restoring the essential elements that have made America the greatest country in the world.