



QUESTIONS & ANSWERS FOR MEDIA OUTLETS

An Interview with Eric Beck

Q: What inspired you to write *Conquering the Political Divide*?

Eric Beck: *Conquering the Political Divide* is a work that I began in the aftermath of my 2012 campaign for Congress (NJ 12). My campaign was one that emphasized the principles of economic freedom, respect for the Constitution, and the protection of fundamental rights. I decided to run for office because I felt that President Obama had abandoned these principles in a manner that was dividing the country. After my Congressional run, I began drafting a roadmap for unifying our nation around the first principles of our representative government; these are the same principles embodied in the Declaration of Independence and Constitution. *Conquering the Political Divide* is the final work product from my writing effort.

Q: What do you believe is the root cause of America's current political divide?

Beck: There have been many theories put forth to explain why America is so divided. The progressive Left sees the divide as being created by social injustice, with the poor and middle class being victimized by the so-called "1 percent." They believe American culture suffers from what they call "hyper-individualism," and that obligations to protect individual rights should be downplayed in favor of the "collective." Progressives would prefer that Americans become more dependent on government which they see leading us to a common social and economic interest. This may sound great in theory, but history shows in practice this approach to government always leads to tyranny and not unity.

I believe a more credible root-cause of America's political divide is sourced to a deficit in our public education system. Specifically, our public schools have graduated at least one generation of young Americans who lack a competent education in two disciplines essential to effective citizenship: civics and economics. Fundamentally, civics teaches us about the Constitution as a framework for republican government that is unique among nations. Civics also teaches us about the limits of the federal government's power, and how we find balance as a nation between freedom and equality. Economics, on the other hand, teaches us about the limits of what we can

realistically achieve as a society through government and the private sector in a world with limited resources. In combination, an understanding of civics and economics empowers citizens to better assess policy proposals to determine whether public officials are working to exploit our fears, just make us feel better, or actually solve a problem.

Q: Your book defends “originalism,” or “originalist” interpretation of the Constitution. What exactly is originalism?

Beck: The term “originalism” describes a principle of jurisprudence that says the meaning of the Constitution was fixed at the time it was enacted, and that it should be understood and interpreted in its historical context and not through arbitrary reinterpretation. Similarly, originalists believe the Constitution embodies a set of fundamental human rights that are bestowed upon us by our Creator (or God) that are not evolving but remain fixed and relevant across time and generations.

Q: You say in your book that the “progressive Left” is working to undermine the Constitution by challenging originalism. What is a progressive and how are they challenging originalism?

Beck: A progressive is someone that challenges the idea of originalism and the historical relevancy of rights. They believe the Constitution and the rights it embodies should evolve to reflect the arbitrary opinions and concerns of those who hold political power at a given moment in time. President Woodrow Wilson, a leading progressive of his time, professed this view even though he took an oath to defend the Constitution. For example, Wilson once said *“the underlying understandings of a Constitutional system are modified from age to age by changes of life and circumstance and corresponding alterations of opinion. It does not remain fixed in any unchanging form, but grows with the growth and is altered with the change of the nation's needs and purposes.”* This progressive notion of rights has been described as “tyranny-of-the-majority” because they believe transient majorities can modify or eliminate any right they choose, including fundamental human rights. That includes modifying our right to freedom of speech, religion, assembly, ownership of property and others. This is exactly the opposite of what the Founders intended. Therefore, one might define a progressive as someone who believes in undermining unalienable rights protected by the Constitution in favor of arbitrarily defined rights.

Q: Opponents of originalism say the Framers of the Constitution could not possibly have foreseen many of the issues and concerns Americans face in modern times. Therefore, the Constitution must be reinterpreted based on current thinking. Why are they wrong?

Beck: They may not be wrong. American society changes and evolves over time and it may be that government and our interpretation of rights needs to change with it. That’s why the Framers provided us with an amendment process that allowed for the Constitution to be changed. However, adopting a Constitutional amendment is a burdensome and time-consuming process. Therefore, progressives prefer to bypass this process because they view the Constitution as a frivolous annoyance. One way they do this is by undermining the judiciary. Progressives seek to appoint activist judges who will rule in favor of their leftist agenda instead of what the law and Constitution intend. We saw an example of such activism in 2015 when Obama appointees to the

Supreme Court tipped the balance to uphold *Obergefell v. Hodges*, the decision that found a nationwide fundamental right to gay marriage. The majority on the Court cited the Due Process and Equal Protection Clauses of the Fourteenth Amendment to invent this right, one that did not exist at the time the Amendment was enacted. Therefore, the *Obergefell* decision can be viewed as a textbook example of judicial activism that conflicts directly with originalism.

Q: Why do you think “progressivism” has gained the kind of influence that it has within the Democratic Party and on the political left?

Beck: There may be several reasons. Progressivism has had an influence within the Democratic Party since the early 20th century when it became a formal political movement. Quite frankly, even some Republicans have been caught up in aspects of this movement as well (e.g., Teddy Roosevelt, George W. Bush). However, it was not until sometime during the George W. Bush presidency that the leadership of the Democratic Party abandoned any connection to traditional liberalism and adopted a more radical leftist progressive agenda. Such influence may have been a reaction to two unpopular wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. It may be that Democrats were reacting to the loss of political power with the election of Bush, or that moderate Democrats no longer trusted the system after Al Gore won the popular vote in 2000 but lost in the electoral college. Regardless of the cause, the modern-day Democrat Party is decidedly a progressive Left party.

Q: If you could do one thing to heal the political divide America is facing today, what would that be?

Beck: I don’t believe there is a silver bullet solution to healing this divide. Reuniting a nation as culturally diverse as ours cannot happen overnight. The Founders understood that for America to survive in the long-term, we could not do what other nations had done which is to rely on ethnic culture to achieve national unity. The Founders understood that Americans would need to agree on a common set of principles to remain united over time. These first principles are embodied in the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights (aka, the “Founding Documents”).

To reunify America, I believe two things need to happen. First, prominent national leaders need to publicly call on Americans to recommit themselves to the core principles embodied in the Founding Documents. Recommitment to the Constitution is especially important as it is the framework for our representative government. Lincoln called for such a recommitment to principle during his Gettysburg Address, even before the Civil War had ended. Martin Luther King called for this commitment many times during the civil rights movement, including as part of his famous “I Have a Dream” speech. We need our national leaders to call for a recommitment to Constitutional principles to ensure everyone is focused on a common national objective. That objective should include equal opportunity for all, and not equal outcomes as progressives would prefer.

Second, we need to recognize the importance of educating all citizens in the disciplines of civics and economics. Thomas Jefferson acknowledged the importance of such education in his writings saying *“I know no safe depository of the ultimate powers of the society but the people themselves;*

and if we think them not enlightened enough to exercise their control with a wholesome discretion, the remedy is not to take it from them but to inform their discretion by education. This is the true corrective of abuses of Constitutional power.” Therefore, the second thing I would do is work to educate Americans on civics and economics. One important way to do this is to encourage all Americans to read my book: *Conquering the Political Divide*.

Q: One word I don’t see a lot of in your book is the word “liberal,” either as a noun or an adjective. Why?

Beck: I have intentionally tried to avoid using the word “liberal” in this book because it has unfortunately become synonymous in recent decades with the term “progressive Leftist” or “socialist.” Traditional liberalism, also known as “classical liberalism,” is not inconsistent with the Founder’s vision for America. For example, classical liberals believed in individuals acting in their own economic self-interest, and they opposed defending collective rights at the expense of individual rights. Therefore, I have tried to reflect a differentiation between progressive Leftists who are the true opponents of the Founders vision for America, and “liberals” or “liberalism” per se. In fact, you should note there are places in my book where I even quote classical liberal statemen, like the late Senator Patrick Moynihan, to defend my point of view.

Q: There are other books on the market that claim to offer a pathway toward political unity. What makes your book unique compared to other books about unifying our nation?

Beck: Other authors have written books about how to reunite the nation based on the psychology of bridge building, changing the nature and size of government, encouraging dependency on government, or by pushing a specific agenda. *Conquering the Political Divide* is unique because it speaks to why a competent understanding of both civics and economics encourages greater respect for the ideas and ideals of the Constitution, an understanding that provides a basis for national unity. As remedial education in civics and economics, my book empowers the reader with a greater appreciation of the Founder’s vision of the American Dream and provides them with a roadmap that they can follow to to defend the Constitution from progressivism.

Q: Who do you believe should read *Conquering the Political Divide*, and how will they benefit?

Beck: Any American who shares my concern about defending the Constitution from progressive influence and protecting the Founders vision of the American Dream will benefit from reading this book. However, there are certain readers who may especially benefit. These readers include:

- **College Bound Students:** One group who will benefit from reading *Conquering the Political Divide* are college-bound high school graduates. Many of these young people will no doubt need to defend an intellectual honest interpretation of Constitutional principles against leftist political influence that is so common in America’s elite universities. *Conquering the Political Divide* will prepare college-bound students with arguments they can use to counter progressive Leftism when they encounter it from their professors, fellow students, or campus speakers.
- **Educators:** Teachers, school administrators, and boards of education members who influence the public-school curriculum, particularly for high school students, would benefit greatly from

this read. These professionals are on the front lines in responding to the educational gap that studies confirm exists for graduating seniors in their understanding of civics and economics. Teachers in our public schools are particularly important because they may represent the last line of educational influence for the non-college bound. Conquering the Political Divide can give educators the civic and economic grounding they need to pass the same on to the next generation of citizens.

- **Government and Politics:** Finally, there are many individuals who work either in government, public affairs or are running for office who are loyal patriots, but who do not have a broad-based background in public policy. Conquering the Political Divide reads very much like a public policy briefing manual to educate the reader about what economic, healthcare and social policies are both economically viable and Constitutionally sound. Therefore, this book will provide relevant context that will help public officials craft constitutionally consistent policy proposals that seek to conserve the Founder's vision of the American Dream.

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