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Government's Greatest Priorities of the Next Half Century

No one can be sure what the next fifty years will hold in terms of government achievement, nor can anyone be sure just what the federal government will be doing fifty years from now. The government will almost certainly launch entirely new endeavors, some of which will be driven by scientific breakthroughs already within reach, others from tragedies not yet imagined. Just as the events of September 11 spawned an entirely new effort to protect homeland security, some future tragedy may also spark a new government initiative.

If the past is prologue, however, government will continue working on many of its greatest endeavors of the past fifty years. The federal government has been working to defend the nation, help veterans readjust, protect workers, build roads, enhance transportation, promote economic growth, and support the poor since the founding of the Republic. It is hardly likely to stop now.

Federal efforts over the past fifty years clearly made their mark on the nation and the world. To the extent a society is measured by what it asks its government to do, America can be proud, indeed. According to last year's Center for Public Service report on government's greatest achievements, the federal government spent the past half century tackling a series of tough, important problems, and often succeeded beyond expectations. No one was sure that the federal government could conquer life threatening diseases such as polio and tuberculosis, or that it could send a man to the moon and return him safely to Earth, but it succeeded at both. No one was sure the federal government could make progress on reducing discrimination, expanding the right to vote, or making a high school education a universal expectation, but it made progress on all fronts.

Setting Priorities for the Next Half Century

Not every government endeavor has produced results. At least some of the government's greatest priorities of the next fifty years can be found in its greatest disappointments of the past. Having fallen short on important, tough problems such as advancing human rights abroad and reducing nuclear arms, the federal government already has plenty to do honoring promises it has already made.

Yet setting priorities is not just about addressing past failures. It is also about protecting past achievements. It could be, for example, that advancing human rights abroad would cost so much in time, energy, and federal dollars that the federal government would be unable to maintain the same level of support for expanding voting rights, improving water quality, or promoting financial security in retirement.

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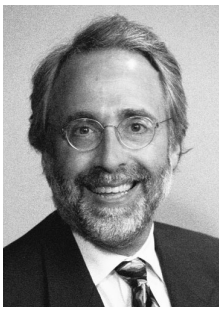

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Setting The Course For

Moreover, government achievement can ebb and flow with changing economic, social, and political circumstances, including events such as September 11, which heightened the importance of a number of endeavors related to terrorism; the Florida election impasse, which put renewed emphasis on the right to vote; or the anthrax scare, which brought immediate attention to the nation's effort to reduce and prevent disease. Achievement also changes with sudden and unexpected breakthroughs, such as President Bush's recent decision to cut U.S. long-range nuclear weapons.

Moreover, because perseverance is one source of achievement, government endeavors should become more successful with the mere passage of time. As Brookings scholar Ron Haskins argues, the 1996 welfare reform is looking more successful with each passing year. Poverty rates among all demographic groups declined for the seventh year in a row in 2000—with the child poverty rate reaching its lowest level since 1976—largely because welfare recipients were required to work under the 1996 reforms.

Rating Priorities

The first step in rating government's greatest priorities of the future is to start with a list of possible priorities based on the federal government's greatest endeavors of the present. Here, the term "greatest" does not mean either "most successful," or "most important," or even "most appropriate." Rather, the federal government's greatest endeavors of the present are the ones in which the government has made the greatest investment.

The tracks of those endeavors can be identified in the federal budget, which shows how much Congress and the president have spent on solving big problems such as improving access to health care for older Americans. They can also be found in the Code of Federal Regulations, which tracks how much administrative energy is being devoted to problems such as reducing workplace discrimination or improving air quality, or the federal organization chart, which shows how many agencies are engaged in tackling problems such as urban poverty or national security.

At least for the Center for Public Service's Government Endeavors Project, the easiest way to identify the federal government's greatest endeavors is to look to the federal statute books, which contain thousands of laws enacted over the past half century to address virtually every foreign and domestic problem imaginable. By using the Congressional Quarterly Almanac to determine which of those laws were major, we compared those laws with other lists of major laws, such as David Mayhew's inventory in Divided We Govern. We then divided the roughly 540 major laws that emerged from that analysis by subject matter and re-combined them by the problem to be solved. This project generated a list of the federal government's fifty most intensive, current endeavors. (The complete list can be found on page 12 of this report.)

Homeland defense was not on this list when the project was designed last spring, and so illustrates the role of crisis in setting new priorities. This is not to suggest that terrorism was not

Future Federal Endeavors

on the federal agenda before September 11. The United States most certainly knew about Osama bin Laden and his al Qaeda network before September 11, while Congress and the president had been warned by the U.S. Commission on National Security in the 21st Century that "Americans will likely die on American soil, possibly in large numbers." However, no one could have anticipated the extraordinary sophistication and cruelty involved in the New York and Washington attacks, nor the extraordinary increase in federal action that would be required by the new war on terrorism.

Government achievement can ebb and flow with changing economic, social, and political circumstances, including events such as September 11, which heightened the importance of a number of endeavors.

With this list of potential priorities in hand, a combined sample of academics was drawn from among the 15,000 members of the American Historical Association, the 13,500 members of the American Political Science Association, the 13,000 members of the American Sociological Association, and the 22,000 members of the American Economic Association. The result was a list of 2,004 academics who specialize in either modern American history, American government, social policy, or public policy.

Contacted by mail in July 2001, these academics were given a password-protected address where they could fill out the questionnaire on government's greatest priorities of the next fifty years. Respondents were first asked whether the federal government should be involved in each of the fifty current endeavors.

If they answered "yes," respondents were then asked whether the federal government should be involved: (1) because the endeavor involves a very, somewhat, or not too important issue, (2) because it has a large, moderate, or small responsibility to address the issue, and (3) whether the endeavor should be a top, major, or minor priority.

If, however, respondents answered "no," they were asked whether the federal government should not be involved (1) because the endeavor does not involve an important issue, (2) because the endeavor is not a federal responsibility, or (3) because past efforts to solve the problem have failed.

A total of 550 historians, political scientists, sociologists, and economists completed the survey, producing a response rate of 27 percent. This sample of 115 historians, 160 political scientists, 115 sociologists, and 160 economists is not remotely representative of the American public as a whole. Most respondents presumably had a Ph.D., just under half (46 percent) had tenure at their college or university, most were white (89 percent), male (76 percent), self-identified liberals (58 percent), and Democrats (77 percent). Nevertheless, this is the face of the faculty that has substantial influence over what the nation views as government's greatest priorities through their teaching, research, and service.

To make sure that no single discipline was given more of a voice due to higher response rates, all totals below were weighted so that each one was equivalent to 115 respondents. The survey was conducted on behalf of the Center for Public Service by Princeton Survey Research Associates, and has a margin of error of plus or minus 5 percent.

To Be Continued....

Setting priorities among government's fifty greatest current endeavors involves at least four decisions: which endeavors should be continued or stopped; which are most important; which are the federal government's greatest responsibility; and which should have the highest priority?

An endeavor cannot be a top priority, or a priority of any kind, if it is not worth pursuing at all. Measured by their support for federal involvement, a majority of the 550 historians, political scientists, sociologists, and economists actually said the federal government should be involved in all fifty endeavors. Twenty-eight of the fifty endeavors were endorsed by at least 90 percent of the academics, another eleven received at least 80 percent, four received at least 70 percent, four received at least 60 percent, and three received at least 50 percent. Even the very last endeavor on the continue list, devolving responsibility to the states, received a 54 percent vote. These academics clearly had an appetite for endeavor.

The Top Ten Items On The Continuation List Were:

1. Improve Air Quality (98 percent endorsed involvement)
2 tie. Increase Arms Control and Disarmament (97 percent)
Reduce Disease
Ensure Safe Food and Drinking Water
5 tie. Strengthen the Nation's Airways System (96 percent)
Improve Water Quality
Make Government More Transparent to the Public
Enhance Consumer Protection
Protect the Wilderness
10 tie. Reduce Exposure to Hazardous Waste (95 percent)
Expand and Protect the Right to Vote

The Top Ten Items On The Disengagement List Were:

1. Devolve Responsibility to the States (46 percent said the endeavor should be discontinued)
2. Promote and Protect Democracy (45 percent)
3. Stabilize Agricultural Prices (41 percent)
4 tie. Reduce Illegal Drug Use (39 percent)
Reform Taxes
6. Increase Market Competition (37 percent)
7. Expand Home Ownership (33 percent)
8 tie. Increase the Supply of Low-Income Housing (24 percent)
Reduce Dependency among Welfare Recipients
10. Expand Job Training and Placement (22 percent)

September 11 had almost no impact on the list of items to be continued, but a very significant impact on the list of items to be abandoned. Academics were significantly more likely to say the federal government should discontinue its efforts to devolve responsibility to the states after September 11 (49 percent post-September 11 v. 37 percent pre-), reform taxes (41 percent post- v. 32 pre-), increase market competition (40 percent post- v. 31 percent pre-), and significantly less likely to favor discontinuing the effort to expand home ownership (30 percent post- v. 40 percent pre-) and increasing the supply of low-income housing (21 percent post- v. 32 percent pre-). Although one cannot be sure whether respondents were thinking about the victims of the September attacks, the events of the 11th clearly emphasized the need for a national

government and higher spending, while showing the need for government to step in to help the needy.

Interestingly, respondents were statistically as likely to reject the effort to promote and protect democracy both before and after the 11th. Respondents were not just reacting to the broad goal of the endeavor, but to the fact that the endeavor was designed to impede communism. Some respondents may have ranked it low on future involvement because the cold war is over and communism seems in broad decline, while others may have been focusing on the Vietnam War as an example of a particular failure. As noble as protecting democracy seems as a broad goal, federal action has included its share of what these respondents saw as uncertain goals and mixed success. Of the respondents who said the endeavor should be discontinued, 55 percent said it was not an important issue, 47 percent said past policies had failed, and just 29 percent said it was not a federal responsibility.

Although there were differences within the ratings by discipline and demographics, almost all of the variation can be explained by ideology. In statistically significant terms, liberals were more likely than conservatives to endorse continuation on 34 of the fifty endeavors, while conservatives were more likely than liberals to endorse continuation on just seven.

There were no surprises among the endeavors each group favored. Conservatives were more likely than liberals to endorse devolving responsibilities to the states (91 percent v. 37 percent), reforming taxes (96 percent v. 48 percent), and increasing market competition (89 percent v. 51 percent), while liberals were more likely than conservatives to favor renewing impoverished communities (92 percent v. 34 percent), expanding job training (91 percent v. 30 percent), and improving mass transportation (96 percent v. 48 percent).

Ideology also helps explain the differences between the academic disciplines. The fact that 63 percent of the economists rated themselves as conservative or moderate, compared to 45 percent of the historians, 37 percent of the political scientists, and just 19 percent of the sociologists, clearly explains why economists generally gave lower endorsements to almost all of the fifty endeavors than historians, political scientists, and sociologists, including two sub-50 percent endeavors for expanding home ownership (45 percent) and stabilizing agricultural prices (32 percent), and why sociologists gave higher endorsements to more of the endeavors than historians, political scientists, and economists.

Demography also helps explain some of the differences between the disciplines. The economists were much more likely to be male than the sociologists. A third of the sociologists were female, compared to a quarter of the historians, and just under a fifth of the economists and political scientists. Economics may be a discipline that draws somewhat more conservative individuals by nature, but it also seems to attract individuals who are more likely to be conservative by gender.

It is impossible to know whether the rankings would have changed had the sample been more representative of the American public as a whole. Although levels of support would have dropped here and risen there, the fact is that most of the respondents—liberal, moderate, or conservative—favored continuation of most of the endeavors, and in mostly the same order.

Although a sample composed solely of conservatives or liberals would have produced different rankings, the American public actually splits roughly equally between conservative, moderate, and liberal. In this regard, the economists come closest to representing the American public as a whole at 26 percent liberal, 49 percent moderate, and 14 percent conservative. Adding more conservatives to their midst would have altered the list only slightly.

Degrees of Importance

Once past the threshold question of whether the federal government should continue or discontinue each endeavor, setting priorities involves a more basic assessment of importance. In theory, the federal government's greatest priorities should involve the nation's most important problems.

The list of important endeavors combines a mix of past successes and disappointments. These respondents believe that the federal government still has important work to do on voting rights, retirement security, air quality, and food and drinking water safety, all of which made the list of government's greatest achievements of the past fifty years. At the same time, they also believe the federal government has important work to do on difficult problems such as providing health care access for the poor. These respondents still see room for improvement across a range of issues.

As expected from the earlier discussion of ideology and demography, the academics disagreed on importance by discipline and demographics. Economists were the least likely to define issues as important, followed by political scientists, historians, and sociologists. The sociologists disagreed with the economists on the importance of 33 out of the fifty endeavors, with political scientists on 25, and historians on 15, taking the more liberal position in all cases.

Ten Most Important Issues To Continue Were:

1.	Increase Arms Control and Disarmament (81 percent said this was a very important issue)
2 tie.	Expand and Protect the Right to Vote (73 percent)
	Increase Health Care Access for Low-Income Americans
4 tie.	Improve Air Quality (68 percent)
	Promote Financial Security in Retirement
6.	Improve Elementary and Secondary Education (67 percent)
7 tie.	Increase Health Care Access for Older Americans (63 percent)
	Provide Assistance to the Working Poor
9 tie.	Ensure Safe Food and Drinking Water (61 percent)
	Reduce Workplace Discrimination

Ten Least Important Issues To Continue Were:

40 tie.	Reform Taxes (23 percent said it was a very important issue)
	Help Victims of Disasters
	Promote and Protect Democracy
43.	Improve Government Performance (22 percent)
44.	Increase Market Competition (16 percent)
45.	Devolve Responsibility to the States (13 percent)
46 tie.	Reduce Illegal Drug Use (12 percent)
	Support Veterans Readjustment and Training
48 tie.	Promote Space Exploration (11 percent)
	Expand Home Ownership
50.	Stabilize Agricultural Prices (8 percent)

For example, sociologists were much more likely to see the need to continue reducing nuclear weapons: 95 percent rated the issue as very important, compared to 86 percent of historians, 73 percent of economists, and just 69 percent of political scientists. Sociologists were also more likely to see the problems in all facets of poverty: 85 percent rated health care access for low-income Americans as very important, compared to 74 percent of political scientists, 72 percent of historians, and 62 percent of economists.

The federal government should reserve its greatest energies for problems that only it can solve.

Among the most important concerns, historians took the stronger position on the right to vote, and all four disciplines were in close agreement on the importance of promoting financial security in retirement. Although the disagreements obviously outnumbered the agreements, there were six endeavors in which the four samples did find common ground, including the importance of promoting space exploration and reducing illegal drug use.

Degrees of Responsibility

The federal government's greatest priorities should also involve endeavors that are largely federal responsibilities. Simply stated, the federal government should reserve its greatest energies for problems that only it can solve.

These lists appear to mix two different explanations for federal engagement. On the one hand, many respondents appear to view the federal government as the only level that can handle interstate problems such as air pollution, food safety, and airline safety. They also believe that the federal government is the only level that can and should mount a strong national defense, control immigration, and negotiate arms control. After all, state and local governments do not have armies, most do not have borders with other nations, and none have nuclear weapons.

Similarly, these respondents appear to believe that states, localities, nonprofits, and the private sector have the greater responsibility for helping victims of disaster, reducing crime, reducing welfare dependency, and renewing poor communities. Other traditional state and local priorities such as improving elementary and secondary education, increasing low income housing, and improving mass transportation were also rated below the 40 percent mark on federal responsibility.

On the other hand, these respondents still believe that state and local government cannot be trusted to protect the right to vote, reduce workplace discrimination, reduce exposure to hazardous waste, or protect the wilderness. Nor do they believe that state and local governments can assemble a health care financing system to cover the elderly or poor, or find the political will to provide assistance for the working poor. Although some states such as California, Massachusetts, Minnesota, and Wisconsin have been leaders in setting stringent environmental standards or making voting easier, these respondents appear to worry more about the states that have lagged behind, whether in helping the needy or enhancing the right to vote.

Ten Endeavors of Largest Responsibility Were:

1. Increase Arms Control and Disarmament (87 percent said the federal government has a large responsibility)
2. Expand and Protect the Right to Vote (78 percent)
3. Strengthen the National Defense (74 percent)
4. Promote Financial Security in Retirement (67 percent)

5 tie. Improve Air Quality (66 percent)
Increase Health Care Access for Low-Income Americans

7. Strengthen the Nation's Airways System (62 percent)
8. Ensure Safe Food and Drinking Water (60 percent)

9 tie. Protect the Wilderness (58 percent)
Reduce Exposure to Hazardous Waste
Reduce Workplace Discrimination
Increase Health Care Access for Older Americans
Control Immigration
Provide Assistance for the Working Poor

Ten Endeavors Of Least Responsibility Were:

40 tie. Develop and Renew Impoverished Communities (27 percent said the federal government had a large responsibility)
Help Victims of Disaster

42. Promote and Protect Democracy (26 percent)

43 tie. Reduce Crime (25 percent)
Reduce Dependency among Welfare Recipients

45. Expand Job Training and Placement (23 percent)
46. Increase Market Competition (21 percent)
47. Devolve Responsibility to the States (18 percent)

48 tie. Reduce Illegal Drug Use (11 percent)
Stabilize Agricultural Prices

50. Expand Home Ownership (7 percent)

Not all of these ratings involved a rational distribution of responsibilities across the sectors, however. Respondents did not think the federal government had particularly significant responsibility for promoting democracy, for example, nor for space exploration, or devolving responsibility to the states. But if responsibility on these issues does not lie with the federal government, then with whom does it lie? Only the federal government has a space program and only the federal government can devolve responsibilities to the states.

Top Ten Federal Failures Were:

1. Increase Arms Control and Disarmament (72 percent said past efforts had failed)
2. Increase Market Competition (77 percent)
3. Reduce Illegal Drug Use (74 percent)
4. Reduce Dependency among Welfare Recipients (61 percent)
5. Control Immigration (60 percent)
6. Develop and Renew Impoverished Communities (58 percent)
7. Increase International Economic Development (57 percent)
8. Reduce Exposure to Hazardous Waste (55 percent)

9 tie. Expand Foreign Markets for U.S. Goods (54 percent)
Increase the Supply of Low-Income Housing (54 percent)

Government's Greatest Failures

Much as one can admire the effort to address difficult problems such as discrimination, pollution, or poverty, the federal government should pursue priorities that have at least some chance of success, which in turn implies at least some history of impact.

Past failure was a recurring theme among academics who felt that the federal government should discon-

tinue endeavors such as stabilizing agricultural prices, devolving responsibilities to the states, and promoting and defending democracy from communism.

It is important to note, however, that the failure question was only asked of academics who said an endeavor should be discontinued. As a result, it is not clear whether this list would be the same for those who said each endeavor should be continued.

The Top Priorities of the Next Fifty Years

Unlike last year's rankings of government's greatest achievements, which involved a mix of importance, difficulty, and success, it is much easier to rank the federal government's top priorities of the future. All one has to do is ask each respondent which endeavors should be a top priority and provide the list.

Ten Top Priorities For The Future Were:

1.	Increase Arms Control and Disarmament (65 percent said this should be a top priority)
2.	Increase Health Care Access for Low-Income Americans (59 percent)
3.	Expand and Protect the Right to Vote (53 percent)
4.	Promote Financial Security in Retirement (51 percent)
5.	Provide Assistance for the Working Poor (47 percent)
6 tie.	Improve Air Quality (43 percent)
	Increase Health Care Access for Older Americans
8.	Improve Elementary and Secondary Education (41 percent)
9.	Reduce Workplace Discrimination (39 percent)
10.	Strengthen the National Defense (36 percent)

Ten Lowest Priorities For The Future Were:

40 tie.	Improve Government Performance (13 percent)
	Reduce Dependency among Welfare Recipients
42 tie.	Strengthen the Nation's Highway System (10 percent)
	Help Victims of Disaster
44.	Devolve Responsibility to the States (8 percent)
45 tie.	Increase Market Competition (6 percent)
	Reduce Illegal Drug Use
47 tie.	Support Veterans Readjustment and Training (5 percent)
	Promote Space Exploration
49.	Expand Home Ownership (4 percent)
50.	Stabilize Agricultural Prices (2 percent)

The lists offer two lessons about setting priorities for the future. First, past success can be a predictor of future priority as well as future disinterest. The fact that the federal government has done so well on financial security in retirement, expanding the right to vote, providing health care access for the elderly, and improving air quality in the past is no reason to stop those endeavors now, particularly when events such as the Florida election impasse suggest that there is still work to be done. Yet the fact that the federal government also did well in strengthening the highway system, helping veterans readjust, and promoting space exploration is not cause for making it a priority. At least for these academics, the federal government has done enough on those endeavors.

The federal government has important work to do in addressing past failures.

Second, these respondents believe that the federal government has important work to do in addressing past failures. Expanding health care access for poor Americans was rated number 34 on the list of government's greatest achievements of the past half century, improving and elementary and secondary education was number 35, and providing assistance for the working poor was number 40, again in large part because they were so difficult to solve. There were several significant differences between respondents who filled out the survey before and after September 11. Those who completed the survey after the 11th were more likely to give a higher priority to both arms control (69 percent v. 56 percent) and health care access for low-income Americans (61 percent v. 52 percent), probably because of heightened concerns about an unsafe world.

Post-September 11 respondents also gave a number of terrorism-related endeavors higher ratings as priorities: strengthen the nation's airways system (37 percent post-September 11 v. 16 percent pre-September 11), ensure an adequate energy supply (32 percent v. 20 percent), enhance the nation's health care infrastructure (25 percent v. 13 percent), increase the stability of financial markets (20 percent v. 13 percent), enhance workplace safety (20 percent v. 11 percent), reduce crime (18 percent v. 8 percent), and help victims of disaster (11 percent v. 5 percent).

Finally, post-September respondents were much more likely to mention the war on terrorism when asked whether there were any top priorities missing from the survey. Only 3 percent mentioned terrorism before the 11th, compared to 15 percent after the 11th, which made the endeavors the top missing priority from the list.

Two Futures

American government faces two very different futures. One is hopeful, the other uncertain, one bright with new achievement, the other clouded with questions about America's willingness to persevere.

The first future is one in which the nation's leaders are able to maintain the bipartisan spirit that marks so much of government's past achievement. It is one in which Congress and the president work together to forge consensus on the tough, important problems already known and address the crises not yet imagined. It is also a future in which Congress, the president, and the public embrace the patient progress that has produced so much achievement in the past.

The second future is one in which Congress and the president worry so much about their re-election and popularity that they demand immediate success or none at all. It is one in which young Americans continue to avoid government service for fear of dead-end careers and bureaucratic red-tape, thereby robbing government of the talent it needs to succeed. It is also a future in which the nation's own leaders continue to demean government and its civic partners for not being able to do more and more with less and less.

It is not yet clear which future will emerge from the current crisis. What is clear is that future success demands strong, bipartisan leadership from both Congress and presidents and public tolerance for the small steps that eventually add up to great impact. Continued progress demands raw political courage of the kind shown in so many of the past breakthroughs listed on the following pages of this report.

Future success demands strong, bipartisan leadership from both Congress and presidents and public tolerance for the small steps that eventually add up to great impact.

Given its past record of success through periods of civil unrest, domestic terrorism, international anxiety, and its own political instability, it is hard to bet against the federal government. Although each generation must address its own challenges—some entirely new, others familiar—the American system of government has been mostly moving forward for more than two hundred years. Where there is a will, there has always been a way. The question for the future is whether the will exists. In this new era of uncertainty, the answer, so far, has been yes.

Government's Greatest Endeavors of the Present

Endeavor	Description
Advance Human Rights and Provide Humanitarian Relief	Action to improve social conditions abroad by protecting human rights and providing relief aid, e.g., United Nations charter 1945, Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act 1986, Kosovo intervention 1999.
Balance Federal Budget	Action to reduce deficits and maintain a balanced federal budget, e.g., Balanced Budget and Emergency Deficit Control Act (Gramm-Rudman-Hollings) 1985, Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act 1990, Omnibus Budget Reconciliation 1993, Balanced Budget Act 1997.
Control Immigration	Action to set and enforce standards on immigration, temporary admission, naturalization and the removal of aliens, e.g., Immigration and Nationality Act (McCarran-Walter) 1952, Immigration and Nationality Act amendments 1965, Immigration Reform and Control Act 1986, Immigration Act 1990.
Develop and Renew Impoverished Communities	Action to improve the quality of life in poor rural and urban areas, e.g., Appalachian Regional Development Act 1965, Demonstration Cities Act 1966, Community Renewal and New Markets Act 2000.
Devolve Responsibility to the States	Action to shift power from the federal government to the states, e.g., State and Local Fiscal Assistance Act (general revenue sharing) 1972, Unfunded Mandate Reform Act 1995, Education Flexibility Partnership Act, 1999.
Enhance Consumer Protection	Action to create safety standards and raise awareness of potential hazards, e.g., Amendments to Food, Drug and Cosmetics Act 1962; Fair Packaging and Labeling Act 1966; Consumer Product Safety Act 1972.
Enhance the Nation's Health Care Infrastructure	Action to build medical treatment and research facilities, e.g., Hospital Survey and Construction Act 1946; Mental Retardation Facilities Construction Act 1963; Heart Disease, Cancer and Stroke amendments 1965.
Enhance Workplace Safety	Action to reduce workplace hazards, e.g., Federal Coal Mine Health and Safety Act 1969, Occupational Safety and Health Act 1970.
Ensure an Adequate Energy Supply	Action to facilitate the development of domestic energy sources and promote conservation, e.g., Atomic Energy Act 1954, trans-Alaskan pipeline 1973, Energy Policy and Conservation Act 1975, Natural Gas Wellhead Decontrol Act 1989.
Ensure Equal Access to Public Accommodation	Action to desegregate public facilities and require handicapped accessibility, e.g., Civil Rights Act 1964, Open Housing Act 1968, Americans with Disabilities Act 1990.
Ensure Safe Food and Drinking Water	Action to establish and enforce food and water quality standards, e.g., Federal Insecticide, Fungicide and Rodenticide Act 1947; Wholesome Meat Act 1967; Safe Drinking Water Act 1974.
Expand and Protect the Right to Vote	Action to guarantee the right to vote for all Americans over 18, e.g., Civil Rights Act 1964, 24th Amendment 1964, Voting Rights Act 1965, 26th Amendment 1971.
Expand Foreign Markets for U.S. Goods	Action to reduce tariff and non-tariff barriers to trade, e.g., Bretton-Woods Agreement Act 1945, North American Free Trade Agreement 1993, Permanent Normal Trade Relations for China 2000.

Government's Greatest Endeavors of the Present

Endeavor	Description
Expand Home Ownership	Action to promote ownership through home loans and mortgages, e.g., Housing Act 1950, 1959; Tax Reform Act 1986.
Expand Job Training and Placement	Action to create jobs and provide vocational training, e.g., Employment Act 1946, Small Business Act 1953, Economic Opportunity Act 1964, Comprehensive Employment and Training Act 1973, Job Training Partnership Act 1982.
Help Victims of Disasters	Action to assist in disaster relief, prevention, and risk sharing, e.g., Disaster Relief Act 1950, National Flood Insurance Act 1968. Action to develop improved urban mass transportation and railway systems, e.g., Urban Mass Transportation Act 1964, Rail Passenger Service Act 1970.
Improve Air Quality	Action to control air pollution and raise air quality standards, e.g., Clean Air Act 1963, Motor Vehicle Pollution Control Act 1965.
Improve Elementary and Secondary Education	Action to enhance education from preschool through high school, e.g., National Defense Education Act 1958, Elementary and Secondary Education Act 1965, Head Start 1967.
Improve Government Performance	Action to enhance government efficiency, e.g., Civil Service Reform Act 1978, Federal Managers' Financial Integrity Act 1982, Chief Financial Officers Act 1990, Government Performance and Results Acts 1993, Federal Acquisitions Streamlining Act 1994.
Improve Mass Transportation	Action to develop improved urban mass transportation and railway systems, e.g., Urban Mass Transportation Act 1964, Rail Passenger Service Act 1970.
Improve Water Quality	Action to control water pollution and raise water quality standards, e.g., Water Pollution Control Act 1948, 1972; Water Quality Act 1965, 1987.
Increase Access to Post-Secondary Education	Action to provide assistance for higher education through loans, grants, and fellowships and to build and improve facilities, e.g., Higher Education Facilities Act 1963, Higher Education Act 1965.
Increase Arms Control and Disarmament	Action to limit nuclear weapon development and use. e.g., Nuclear Test Ban Treaty 1963, Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty 1969, SALT/ABM Treaty 1972, Intermediate Range Nuclear Force Treaty 1988.
Increase International Economic Development	Action to provide aid for development, e.g., Establishment of the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development under the Bretton-Woods Agreement Act 1945, Act for International Development 1950, Peace Corps 1961.
Increase Health Care Access for Low-Income Families	Action to provide health insurance to poor Americans, e.g., Medicaid 1965, Children's Health Insurance Program 1997.
Increase Market Competition	Action to deregulate industries including airlines, banks, utilities and telecommunications, e.g., Airline Deregulation Act 1978, Gramm-Leach-Bliley Act (financial services overhaul) 1999.
Increase Health Care Access for Older Americans	Action to provide health insurance to older Americans, e.g., Medicare 1965, Catastrophic Health Insurance for the Aged 1988.

Government's Greatest Endeavors of the Present

Endeavor	Description
Increase the Stability of Financial Institutions and Markets	Action to increase access to financial market information, assist ailing institutions and avert potential problems, e.g., Securities and Exchange Act 1975; Insider Trading and Securities Fraud Enforcement Act 1988; Financial Institutions Reform, Recovery and Enforcement Act 1989.
Increase the Supply of Low-Income Housing	Action to develop new public housing and subsidize rents in private units, e.g., Housing Act 1949; Housing and Community Development Act 1965, 1974.
Make Government More Transparent to the Public	Action to increase public access to government activity and reduce administrative abuse, e.g., Administrative Procedures Act 1946; Freedom of Information Act 1966, 1974; Government in the Sunshine Act 1976; Ethics in Government Act 1978; Inspector General Act 1978.
Promote and Protect Democracy	Action to impede communism, e.g., Aid to Greece and Turkey 1947, North Atlantic Treaty 1949, Korean and Vietnam Wars.
Promote Financial Security in Retirement	Action to raise Social Security benefits, expand the number of recipients, ensure the program's solvency, protect private pensions and encourage individual savings for retirement, e.g., Social Security expansions, Supplemental Security Income program 1972, Employment Retirement Income Security Act 1974.
Promote Scientific and Technological Research	Action to support basic research and to develop new technologies, such as the Internet, e.g., National Science Foundation Act 1950, Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency 1958, Communications Satellite Act 1962.
Promote Space Exploration	Action to develop the technology for a lunar landing and further space exploration, e.g., National Aeronautics and Space Administration Act 1958, Apollo mission funding 1962, funds for a manned space station 1984.
Protect Endangered Species	Action to prevent loss of threatened species, e.g., Marine Mammal Protection Act 1972, Endangered Species Act 1973.
Protect the Wilderness	Action to safeguard land from commercial and recreational development, e.g., Wilderness Act 1964, Wild and Scenic Rivers Act 1968, Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act 1980.
Provide Assistance for the Working Poor	Action to raise the income of the working poor through tax credits, assistance with expenses and a guaranteed minimum wage, e.g., Earned Income Tax Credit 1975, Family Support Act 1988, increases to the minimum wage.
Reduce Crime	Action to increase law enforcement officers, strengthen penalties, control guns and support prevention programs, e.g., Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act 1968, 1994; Brady Handgun Violence Prevention Act 1993.
Reduce Dependency Among Welfare Recipients	Action to increase self-sufficiency among welfare recipients, e.g., Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act 1981, Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act 1996.
Reduce Disease	Action to prevent and treat disease through research, direct assistance and regulation, e.g., Polio Vaccine Act 1955, National Cancer Act 1971.
Reduce Exposure to Hazardous Waste	Action to restore the environment and manage hazardous waste, e.g., Resource Conservation and Recovery Act 1976; Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act (Superfund) 1980.

Government's Greatest Endeavors of the Present

Endeavor	Description
Reduce Hunger and Improve Nutrition	Action to provide food assistance to children and adults. e.g., National School Lunch Act 1946; Food Stamp Act 1964; Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) 1972.
Reduce Illegal Drug Use	Action to rehabilitate addicts and strengthen penalties for using and dealing drugs, e.g., Narcotic Control Act 1970, Anti-Drug Abuse Amendments 1988.
Reduce Workplace Discrimination	Action to prohibit employers from discriminating based on race, color, religion, gender, national origin, age or disability. e.g., Equal Pay Act 1963, Civil Rights Act 1964, Age Discrimination Act 1967, Americans with Disabilities Act 1990.
Reform Taxes	Action to lower tax rates. e.g., Revenue Act 1964, Economic Recovery Tax Act 1981, Economic Growth and Tax Relief Act 2001.
Stabilize Agricultural Prices	Action to support crop prices, distribute surpluses and control production. e.g., Agriculture Act 1948, 1961; Agriculture Trade Development and Assistance Act 1954; Food Security Act 1985.
Strengthen the National Defense	Action to build and modernize the national defense. e.g., authorization of tactical and strategic weapons systems, Department of Defense Reorganization Act 1958, Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act 1986.
Strengthen the Nation's Airways System	Action to create and maintain the air traffic control system and promote the safety and development of the air industry. e.g., Federal Airport Act 1946, Airport and Airways Development Act 1970.
Strengthen the Nation's Highway System	Action to build, improve and maintain the interstate highway system. e.g., Federal Aid to Highway Act 1956, Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act 1991.
Support Veterans Readjustment and Training	Action to assist veterans with their transition back to civilian life. e.g., Serviceman's Readjustment Act 1944, New GI Bill Continuation Act (Montgomery GI Bill) 1987.

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