

THE TORCH

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Rollback the Land Grab; Restore Property Rights

By Margaret Byfield, *Executive Director*, American Stewards of Liberty



The progressive green agenda has been soundly rejected by the American people. The 2024 presidential election was about more than just the economy, our borders, and liberties. It was a repudiation of the radical Green New Deal, which sought to take full control of America's food, fiber, minerals, energy, and its citizens' property rights.

One of the most egregious and destructive attacks ever conceived on every individual American's right to own land was Biden's 30x30 agenda, initiated in January 2021 just six days after he entered office. It was an unapologetic bureaucratic 'land grab' seeking to capture 30 percent of our land and oceans by 2030, permanently transforming our once proud Republic into a socialist regime controlled by the administrative state.

The same people working to lock-up our lands then launched the Natural Asset scam, where they sought to monetize natural processes such as pollination, photosynthesis and clean air, and then claim ownership of these newly minted 'assets'.

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American Stewards of Liberty stood in opposition to these agendas; pushing back, exposing, and stopping many of its advances. Most importantly, we stopped the creation of “Natural Asset Companies” poised to be listed on the New York Stock Exchange. The results of the November election brought much hope that these attacks to destroy American’s property rights would end.

But simply rescinding the 30x30 policy, which President Trump did on Day One, does not automatically stop the programs carrying out the agenda. The real work now begins in Congress, the White House, and in federal departments.

Currently, Congress has an unprecedented opportunity to unwind this agenda and begin restoring full constitutional protections for our property rights through the budget reconciliation process now being negotiated on Capitol Hill. Budget reconciliation only requires a majority vote in the Senate, not the normal two-thirds required for most legislation. However, the provisions must meet the Senate test known as the “Byrd Rule.” This rule is designed to make sure the provisions are true budgetary items, not policy changes.

American Stewards of Liberty has identified five key provisions Congress can advance through budget reconciliation that will roll back the damage to private property rights under the Biden Administration.

One - Reduce conservation program funding.

Land conservation programs artificially increase the purchase and lease prices of land while simultaneously taking land out of production, making it harder for landowners to produce America’s food and goods without federal subsidies. As production is reduced, local communities suffer and good-paying jobs found at equipment sellers, parts stores, restaurants, and other vital businesses are lost. Just like areas with higher percentages of government-owned land, areas with large amounts of conservation land find they must rely increasingly on federal grants to pay for schools, hospitals, and roads.

When conservation acres are limited, the federal government cannot directly compete with and outprice the productive landowner. Ag markets can once again become competitive, and landowners will see more direct profits and stability.

Although not appropriate for budget reconciliation, America’s landowners would be further strengthened if Congress were to exclude landowners who choose not to participate in the federal conservation programs from environmental regulations. This tracks with President Trump’s proposal that anyone who invests a billion dollars in America would be exempt from the environmental noose.

Two - Unset and phase-out conservation easements.

Conservation Easements are a deceptive tool environmentalists use to acquire control of private land, forever, at tremendous costs to the government and its citizens. CEs are marketed as a way for landowners to ensure their property will remain in a natural state, protected from future development forever.

Conservation easements act like a tax credit, in that they reduce the taxable value of the land. The tax value of these lands is reduced on average by 40 percent. The result is an increased tax burden on other landowners and citizens in the community who must make up the difference. Additionally, conservation easements increase the need for local governments to depend on federal and state grants to provide basic services.

Once land is placed in a conservation easement, it is no longer functionally private property, as the primary control over the land is held by a land trust or the government. These restrictions bind every generation into the future and freeze the land-use according to today’s practices and societal goals.

If you can’t control the property, you don’t truly own the land.

Three - End funding for new federal land acquisitions.

Congress should also prohibit funds for programs that purchase private property, such as the Land and Water Conservation Fund. These funds increase federal ownership of land while reducing private land ownership, taking more land off the tax rolls and out of production. The federal government has a maintenance backlog in the billions of dollars for the lands they already own. They do not need to add more inventory so that more of our land can be destroyed through bad management, such as the massive wildfires that have plagued the West.

Four - Reduce federal land inventory.

Every good business regularly assesses whether its property holdings make sense and unloads those that no longer meet the business’ purpose. The federal government

should do the same. The federal government holds land that prevents beneficial use of the resources, draining local economies and the American taxpayer. There are booming communities landlocked by federal lands that need more room to expand to accommodate homes, restaurants, and business space for other expanding industries.

Federally-held land in such areas should be identified and sold to citizens as Congress has already authorized, in small parcel sizes to small landowners, and in such a way as to prevent monopolies. In other words, we need to get back to the model established by our Founding Fathers, where every citizen who desires to do so could own enough land to support a family. This effort will help local economies expand, increase proper management of the land through private stewardship, and reduce the federal budget.

Congress can direct the sale of specific parcels of federal lands that would be better purposed if returned to the private sector, excluding those under special protection, such as our national parks and military bases.

Five - Restore local control through coordination.

Congress specifically directed the federal land management agencies to coordinate with States and local governments in 1976 as a way to ensure local priorities were incorporated into the federal land management process. The problem is that no administration has implemented this requirement, and the administrative state has resisted carrying out the law when pressed by local governments.

The federal government has attempted to replace actual coordination, which requires the agencies to work to achieve consistency with the local plans, with a 'cooperative agency' process created through rulemaking, in which they can ignore the local priorities.

Actual coordination prevents federal agencies from destroying local economies and forcing federal plans to harmonize with local policies. Congress recognized that federal land management agencies only manage the land. It is the local governments that protect the health, safety, and welfare of the people, which must be considered in the federal planning process.

To ensure federal plans and policies do not harm the local economy and the health, safety, and welfare of the people, and that the required coordination occurs in compliance with state open meeting laws, Congress can authorize funds through budget reconciliation compelling all federal land management agencies to coordinate with states and local governments as originally directed.

If Congress advances these five provisions through budget reconciliation, it would be a great start to not only rolling back Biden's agenda, but would also put in place policies preventing a future progressive agenda from attempting the same scams.



My father and Nevada rancher Wayne Hage once said: "Either you have the right to own property, or you are property." The radical left knows this as well, which is why they unleashed the international 30x30 agenda, and why they advanced schemes to monetize natural processes such as pollination and photosynthesis.

They understand that to replace our Republic with a socialist state, they must gain control of our land and natural resources, or as Karl Marx put it: abolish private property. We would be naive to believe that they learned their lesson in November and will give up on their Marxist vision.

It is still early in the Trump administration's first 100 days. Much can be done to roll back the destruction caused by the radical Left and reinstate those basic principles that make America the beacon of liberty to the world. Just as Progressives pushed the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022 through the budget reconciliation process, so too can the new Congress cut the bloated federal government, unleash American prosperity, and return control of our land to the American people. •••

Margaret Byfield is the Executive Director of American Stewards of Liberty, working directly with policy leaders to help advance strategies that protect the production of America's food, fiber, minerals, and energy. As a national speaker, writer and commentator on natural resource issues, she has appeared on Epoch TV, FOX News, and has spoken at Freedom Fest, CPAC and other programs across America. Margaret's education began on Pine Creek Ranch in Central Nevada where her family became one of the first Western landowners targeted by the radical environmental agenda resulting in the 27-year legal battle, *Hage v. United States*.

Congress Must Codify Executive Orders; Make Them Permanent -

In his first weeks holding office, President Donald Trump has done far more than any Republican in recent history to restore the justice system, eliminate radical DEI, and dismantle the unelected bureaucracy. But what would stop a future Democrat president from undoing this? While Republicans still control both chambers of Congress — 53-45 in the Senate, and 218-215 in the House — they must act swiftly to turn Trump’s executive orders into law. Come midterms in 2026, control of both chambers will not be guaranteed. So while Republican Speaker Mike Johnson committed to “advancing President Trump’s America First agenda,” Congress must quickly step into its purpose. That means stepping out, away from the influence of lobbyists and special interests, to pass laws that place the American people first. If Republicans in Congress sit on their hands for the next two years — and allow a future Democrat president to return power to unelected bureaucrats — they can expect to be primaried. But if they codify the steps Trump has taken to bring back “America’s Golden Age,” they stand to gain much, not only politically, but in terms of restoring accountable government at a scale their GOP predecessors in the modern age could only have imagined. SOURCE: Logan Washburn, *The Federalist*, February 19, 2025.

Ag. Secretary Calls for Federal Action on Foreign Farm Ownership

Texas-native Brooke Rollins, the new head of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, says seeking a federal solution to ban China from purchasing farmland in the United States will be one of her top priorities. She said there is “no doubt” that the people are concerned about Chinese foreign investment of farmland, and Americans want U.S. farmland to be owned by fellow Americans as opposed to foreigners loyal to the Chinese Communist Party. “One of the very, very top of the list perhaps is the Chinese purchase of our farmland. A lot of that land is around some of our military outposts.”

SOURCE: Matthew Boyle, Breitbart News, February 18, 2025.

Use DOGE Playbook to Expose Corporate Activism -

For the past few weeks, the nascent Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) has begun to uncover how the Left has transformed federal agencies and institutions into tools for political patronage. Elon Musk and his team’s most prominent discovery so far, at least in the public imagination, is the odious behavior of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), an agency that exists ostensibly to project “soft power” abroad but that, in actuality, spends billions of taxpayer dollars each year to sustain a large network of subversive, left-wing non-governmental organizations (NGOs). This NGO Archipelago serves, among other things, to advance the Left’s ideological agenda extra-legislatively. But government agencies like USAID are not the only benefactors of the NGO Archipelago. Indeed, it is possible that they are not even its most prominent benefactors. Both private and corporate philanthropy are essential to its functioning, and it is with an eye toward the latter that we must next turn our attention. Just as USAID spends taxpayer money to advance the pet projects of the international Left, corporate America diverts shareholder wealth to advance equally if not more radical causes. SOURCE: Jack Weir, *The Federalist*, February 20, 2025

GREAT AMERICAN QUOTE

“The moment the idea is admitted into society that property is not as sacred as the laws of God, and that there is not a force of law and public justice to protect it, anarchy and tyranny commence.”

- John Adams

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

“A wise and frugal government, which shall leave men free to regulate their own pursuits of industry and improvement, shall not take from the mouth of labor the bread it has earned - this is the sum of good government.”

- Thomas Jefferson

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