

“What parts of government do conservatives see as essential and/or worthy of increased spending?” - Lauren, Oregon

Conservatives argue that the primary purpose of government is to give citizens the freedom to seek success. The founders worried that [concentrations of political power](#) created a risk of tyranny. At its most basic level, the government ought to be [protecting the natural rights of citizens](#) and providing for national security and defense. Arguments could be made for education, social security, and other safety nets, but only under strict conditions. Elsewhere, we should be looking for ways to reduce government intervention and cut spending, returning that money to the citizens who earned it in the first place.

In terms of policy, we should cut ineffective regulations and programs and invest more in evidence-backed, cost-effective programs. Funding for technical/vocational schools, along with charter schools, [should be increased](#). Zoning restrictions, which [drive up the price of housing](#), should be cut to increase affordability. Federal funding for student loans [should be reduced](#) as it has caused tuition costs - and thus student loan balances - to increase substantially. Excessive occupational licensing requirements, which serve mainly to [prevent competition](#), should be abolished (for example, requiring hair braiders to have cosmetology licenses, even though many cosmetology schools don't teach braiding but do require coursework to study various chemicals that braiders don't use).

We should not raise the federal minimum wage, as doing so would reduce employment; the CBO estimates that a \$15 federal minimum wage would [cost approximately 1.3 million jobs](#). To maintain work incentives, we should require able-bodied adults to work or study in order to receive means-tested government assistance; research has shown that [such requirements increase employment](#). Given the correlation between [marriage and child success](#), we should promote [marriage and parenting skills](#) and eliminate [marriage penalties](#) in transfer programs where married couples receive fewer benefits. Simultaneously, we should expand programs that are both [effective](#) and [pay for themselves](#), such as direct investments in child healthcare, education, and the [Earned Income Tax Credit](#) (EITC).

It's worth noting that while wages themselves have not increased, part of that is because the cost of benefits has gone up. For many middle class workers, health insurance now accounts for nearly a [third of their total compensation](#); increases in employer costs for insurance are thus displacing wage increases. Wages also don't tell the full story about the quality of life; cell phones (including high speed data plans) [computers](#), televisions, etc. have all become much more affordable, but that is [hard for measures of inflation to capture](#), as they do not account for innovation/quality. Samsung notes that "[Today's smartphones](#) are faster than the mid-'80s Cray-2 Supercomputer, faster than the computer onboard the Orion spaceship NASA is currently testing to go to Mars and — perhaps most significantly — faster than the laptops most of us are carrying around."

In terms of inequality, the problem as many conservatives see it is one of *absolute* poverty rather than relative inequality. We should be careful to avoid the [zero-sum fallacy](#): the assumption that as the rich get richer, the poor must get poorer. The supply of wealth is not fixed; economic activity often benefits both parties and [creates value for society](#). Mark Zuckerberg, for example, has earned billions of dollars while also providing billions of people with a free service that they find valuable. If there was no Facebook, Zuckerberg would be a lot poorer but those who value being able to stay in touch with friends and family easily via Facebook's platform would also be worse off. Jeff Bezos, the founder of Amazon, has been criticized for underpaying workers (though Amazon now pays all workers [at least \\$15/hr](#)), but has also provided millions of people with access to quick delivery of cheap items. Such access disproportionately benefits the less fortunate, as they may not have time to visit a store or the ability to pay higher prices, particularly during the pandemic. Research indicates that when people differ in productivity some level of [inequality may be necessary](#) for cooperation.