



Matthew Schlapp

**EDITORS' NOTE** In June of 2014, the board of the American Conservative Union unanimously voted to elect Matt Schlapp as the ninth Chairman. From 2001 to 2005, Schlapp served as President Bush's Political Director during the re-election and previously as his Deputy Political Director. During the 2000 presidential campaign, he was a Regional Political Director with oversight of Missouri, Arkansas, Iowa, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Kansas, and Oklahoma. Schlapp left the White House to run the Washington, D.C. offices of Koch Industries. His Congressional experience began in 1994 where he served Representative Todd Tiahrt (R-KS) as Chief of Staff for five years. Schlapp is a graduate of the University of Notre Dame (B.A.) and Wichita State University (M.P.A.). He and his wife are founding partners of Cove Strategies, a legislative, communications, and political consulting firm.

**ORGANIZATION BRIEF** Founded in 1964, the American Conservative Union (ACU; [conservative.org](http://conservative.org)) is the original conservative organization in the nation. For more than 40 years, ACU has served as an umbrella organization harnessing the collective strength of conservative organizations fighting for Americans who are concerned with liberty, personal responsibility, traditional values, and strong national defense. As America's premier conservative voice, ACU is the leading entity in providing conservative positions on issues to Congress, the Executive Branch, State Legislatures, the media, political candidates, and the public.

### Has the mission for ACU remained consistent or has it evolved?

ACU has been around for more than 50 years so there have been many ebbs and flows. We nominated a conservative in 1964 – a good man who went down in flames. This caused many conservatives to ask if we were really trying to win or if we were just trying to make a statement. They felt that if we were only trying to make a statement, we should concentrate on journalism and other areas. But in politics, we need to win. They understood that until we unify all people on the right and the center right, we're not going to be successful.

# Uniting Conservatives

## An Interview with Matthew Schlapp, Chairman, American Conservative Union (ACU)

At the time, conservatism was a new movement – the word may have seemed strange to people. There were all kinds of conservatives then and there are still all kinds today.

However, there is a new strain of conservatives today who want to see real systemic reform and to change to how Washington operates. They think government has gotten too big and incompetent, and that it needs to be rolled back. That was the mission in 1965 but it also speaks to the times today.

The question is, can we pull people together today in such a way that a majority of American people agree with our values and with the candidates we support, and can we actually win the presidency again?

### Are you optimistic that this can happen?

I'm very optimistic about the country and our future. We have huge challenges, but I believe we can overcome them.

It's very rare that the country rewards one party with three consecutive terms. Americans have always had a reticence about the government and a reticence about giving one party too much power, so we tend to go back and forth. This trend plays to the Conservatives and Republicans this time because we've had Obama for two terms. He has not been overly strong, and the polls indicate that Obamacare is still not popular. The country is ready to look at Republicans so we have that going for us.

On the other side of it, looking at the electoral map, Democrats start off with a large advantage. There are more states that have become more blue than have become more red, and the purple states did a great job of picking them off in the last two campaigns.

History says the American people are willing to look at Republicans because this President will not leave office as a demigod, and they're willing to give the Republican Party another shot. However, we still have to look at the math. The path to victory is narrow but I'm optimistic we can get down it.

### How strong is the ACU's relationship with business leaders?

The definition of who business leaders are has become much more complex in this country. When my parents were my age, most executives of big companies were Republicans. They understood that the Republican Party stands behind the concepts of the importance of a free market, of competition, of families in society, of rewarding success, and of trying

to eliminate things that don't succeed. Today, that's completely changed.

If we look at how the large, publicly held companies pick their CEOs, it often seems devoid of politics. Many times, we have CEOs who are great spokespeople and who are accomplished, but they either don't want to engage in politics or only want to engage with those on the left so they get better press.

The role of ACU and business leaders would have been a natural fit at its inception; today, we're trying to bring awareness that, to some extent, we could be losing some wonderful things about America if we continue to support the left on their regulatory agenda because it's easier and they get headlines. In the end, they are destroying the ability of America to compete on a global stage and they are destroying the political coalition that allows us to come up with reasonable solutions to issues that pop up. The idea is to actually do something that is helpful rather than just doing something that sounds good politically.

### Is success for ACU today principally about who wins on election day or is it more of a continuous movement?

In America, the presidency can't be bought. We have to convince millions of Americans that one's message is right. We want to be impactful.

In 1965, the idea of being a conservative nonprofit was revolutionary and people like William F. Buckley said we needed to create this organization. It is no longer a new idea. There are hundreds of groups on the right who are trying to make a difference and be a bigger player. This means that we need to be innovative in a mature area. We need to beat the left by convincing the American people that we have better ideas.

### Is there some truth to the fact that the Republican Party is becoming two parties?

We basically have two parties in our country: one is very center left and one is very center right. Within these two coalitions, one can find those representing every part of the continuum. In some parliamentary countries, there will be factional parties but, in our case, these factions are encompassed in one of those two parties.

Should it shock anyone to see a lot of disagreement among those parties? Would the country be better served without those disagreements? I don't think so. ●