

## BROWNBACK: America's best days lie ahead

Character drives American greatness

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As we prepare for a new administration, we should not underestimate the magnitude of the difficulties we face as a nation. We are fighting wars on two fronts against enemies pledged to our destruction. Our economy is reeling from a credit crisis of enormous proportions, job losses escalate, and the budgets of businesses and families across the country are stretched to the breaking point.

These are, clearly, big problems. But we Americans have seen bigger. As we search for a model to guide us through our current difficulties, we need look no further than the Greatest Generation - the Americans who lived through the Great Depression and the Second World War. While our current situation is indeed serious, it pales in comparison to what that generation faced: a quarter of Americans unemployed, a collapse of our banking system and a cataclysmic two-front World War against a formidable military force that threatened to overwhelm the free world.

While historians disagree about the specific policies that allowed the United States to overcome these crises, there seems to be widespread acknowledgement of the fact that what allowed us to get through these adversities as a nation and prosper as never before was not so much policy, but character. What we saw in the 1930s and 1940s was an unmatched example of the indomitable American spirit, the spirit that made America great. When we look back on the American story and all the blessings we have experienced in our history, we often fail to look in the right place for the source of that greatness. It seems to me that, rather than asking "what made America great?" it would be more to the point to ask "made America great?" - in other words, who were the people that embodied that indomitable American spirit and what were the qualities of their character? They were the hardworking farmers who diligently went out to plow the fields each day, working with a faith unbowed by adverse circumstances, and focusing on the future of their families by sacrificing, exercising thrift and making prudent decisions.

They were the honorable businessmen who, despite difficult times, followed the rules, didn't cheat their customers, and treated those working for them with dignity. They were the statesmen who, despite political pressure, did what was in the best interests of their country, balancing the need for justice with righteousness. They were the religious leaders who loved the poor and cared for the souls of their flock, without bending to cultural pressures. They were the artists that sought beauty and truth and raised the spirits of their countrymen. They were the workers who sought to be trustworthy and responsible in their work and did not cut corners.

They were the families who raised their children to be generous and truthful, not selfish and manipulative. They were the patriotic soldiers who, in the last measure of sacrifice, gave their lives for

their country. These were the American heroes who allowed us as a nation to triumph over this period of adversity. Today, we face some difficult challenges: a \$10 trillion debt, two wars still being fought, family breakdown, and a world that's looking for leadership from the United States.

At times, these challenges appear daunting, even overwhelming. But we can find our way forward by gazing backward-to the example of those Americans who overcame even greater challenges before us.

Their example teaches us the necessity of, the confidence that our best days are ahead of us. It teaches us of the importance of in assessing our situation, and in coming up with realistic solutions. It teaches us of the need for, the determination that we are going to do what is necessary to overcome our problems, and work with anyone who can help us achieve our aim. And it teaches us not to lose faith in our country, and our fellow citizens' capacity to overcome any problem, no matter how tough. I believe, with Ronald Reagan, that America is an exceptional nation, a shining city on a hill that stands as an example of freedom and responsibility for the rest of the world. That is a humbling thought, but also an inspiring one. With great blessings come great responsibility.

I am confident that America will emerge stronger than ever after this period of adversity. The American spirit always triumphs. But let us never forget that that triumph depends upon each one of us living up to the measure of those who made our nation great.

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