



Written by [Ty Bodden](#) on May 27, 2026

Trump, Massie, and Defining Conservatism

Under a strict constitutional-conservative standard, U.S. President Donald Trump and U.S. Representative Thomas Massie (R-Ky.) cannot be placed in the same category. Although Trump has aligned with conservatives on [judges](#), [border security](#), [deregulation](#), [religious liberty](#), [free speech](#), and opposition to [taxpayer-funded abortion](#), his record also reflects a [strong-executive](#), [high-spending populism](#) that conflicts with constitutional restraint. Massie, by contrast, more consistently represents the older, [Jeffersonian](#) model of conservatism — limited government, federalism, fiscal restraint, civil liberties, war-powers accountability, and fidelity to the Constitution.



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The Standard

Conservatism, properly understood, is not merely loyalty to a party, a movement, or a political personality. It is a philosophy rooted in truth, ordered liberty, moral responsibility, limited government, personal accountability, free enterprise, defense of life, national and state sovereignty, and resistance to government overreach.

From a strict constitutional perspective, methods matter as much as outcomes. A president or legislator may support certain conservative policies, but if he advances them through unconstitutional means, excessive executive power, reckless spending, or disregard for the rule of law, he departs from conservatism.

This distinction is critical when comparing Trump and [Massie](#). Both are identified with conservatism, and both have opposed major elements of the modern Left. Yet the question is not simply whether they are right-wing, anti-leftist, or aligned with Republican voters. The question is whether their governing philosophy matches the constitutional standard of limited, restrained, moral, and lawful government.

Trump's Mixed Record

Trump's strongest conservative credentials are real. He appointed three Supreme Court justices, helping create a conservative-leaning majority that later overturned *Roe v. Wade*. Although they have gotten other rulings [wrong](#), the 2022 [Dobbs decision](#) made a generational impact. Trump's administration has also pursued major deregulation, emphasized border security and national [sovereignty](#), opposed taxpayer funding of elective abortion, [reduced the federal workforce](#), and promoted religious liberty and free speech. These are not minor points — they represent genuine overlap with conservative priorities.

Trump has also understood — at one point perhaps better than most Republican leaders — that many



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Americans felt betrayed by the political Establishment, globalist trade arrangements, mass migration, and institutions hostile to traditional values. His political rise was, in part, a rebellion against a bipartisan ruling class — a uniparty — that had long ignored the concerns of ordinary Americans.

However, a strict constitutional-conservative standard requires more than correct instincts on some issues. It requires fidelity to constitutional processes, limited executive power, fiscal restraint, the free market, and the rule of law.

On those points, Trump's record is far more difficult to defend.

Federal deficits grew substantially during his first term, even before Covid. Trump is responsible for [27.7 percent](#) of the total national debt. During the Covid era, he signed the [CARES Act](#), a massive federal spending package that further expanded Washington's role in the economy.

Trump's governing style has also leaned heavily on executive power. His use of [emergency declarations](#) and unilateral executive action may have pleased supporters in the short term, but conservatives should be wary of any president — Republican or Democrat — who normalizes governing by emergency authority. Such precedents will come back to bite Republicans. The one legitimate exception is when a president voids or [nullifies](#) an unconstitutional act. The government should not enforce unconstitutional rules, laws, or court rulings to begin with.

Trump's position on abortion also reveals a limitation. Returning abortion policy to the states reflects federalism, but a complete defense of life requires more than procedural federalism. Since life begins at conception, government at every level has a duty to protect innocent life — as laid out in the Declaration of Independence. Trump's reluctance to fully embrace that standard makes his pro-life record mixed, despite his judicial appointments and opposition to federal abortion funding. With that said, the [tens of thousands](#) of babies saved deserve to be celebrated.

For these reasons, Trump is best understood as a populist-nationalist Republican with some conservative commitments — conservative on certain outcomes, but not consistently conservative in constitutional method.

Massie's Constitutional Consistency

Massie fits the strict constitutional-conservative standard much more closely, with his record reflecting a consistent commitment to limited government, federalism, fiscal restraint, civil liberties, and separation of powers. He has supported [abolishing](#) the federal Department of Education (something Trump [campaigned](#) on), arguing that education should be directed by parents, locals, and churches rather than unelected bureaucrats in Washington. He has also [opposed](#) one-size-fits-all federal firearms restrictions, and supported returning authority to state and local governments.

Massie's fiscal record is especially important. Unlike many Republicans who campaign on spending restraint but vote for bloated appropriations bills, Massie has repeatedly opposed major spending measures, including continuing resolutions supported by most of his own party. That willingness to oppose Republican leadership when constitutional principles are at stake is a mark of genuine conservatism, not betrayal.

Massie has also been consistent on civil liberties. He has opposed [warrantless surveillance](#), surveillance "backdoors," and [abuses](#) of Section 702 of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act. A constitutional conservative does not excuse violations of the [Fourth Amendment](#) merely because they are committed in the name of national security. Massie's position reflects the Founders' understanding that liberty and



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security must not be separated from constitutional safeguards.

Massie's record on war powers is firmly constitutional as well. He has insisted that Congress, not the president, holds the sole power to declare war under [Article I, Section 8, Clause 11](#). His opposition to undeclared wars, foreign entanglements, and open-ended military commitments reflects the Constitution's original design. The executive branch may command the military, but it does not possess unilateral authority to take the nation to war against countries that have not attacked the United States.

Massie's support for [withdrawing](#) the United States from NATO also follows from this constitutional and sovereignty-based view. The reasoning is consistent: The United States should avoid permanent foreign entanglements that compromise national sovereignty and encourage unconstitutional military commitments — no matter the country.

On life, Massie has been [equally clear](#). He has stated that life begins at conception, opposed taxpayer funding of abortion, and supported legislation to prevent U.S. foreign aid from funding or facilitating abortions abroad. That position aligns more closely with a complete defense of life than Trump's more politically flexible approach.

Which Conservatism?

The comparison between Trump and Massie reveals a broader divide within American conservatism.

Trump represents a populist, nationalist, executive-centered model more [reminiscent](#) of the [Democratic Party](#) of the [1980s](#) and 1990s than of the constitutional tradition. That might be why he was so popular. He often fights the right enemies, he has advanced some important conservative causes, and it is not his fault that Congress fails to act when he is in the right. Yet his approach frequently relies on strong executive action, political loyalty, and personal dominance. His style may appeal to voters who want a fighter, but it is not the same as constitutional conservatism.

Massie represents a constitutional, liberty-oriented, Jeffersonian model. He emphasizes enumerated powers, spending restraint, civil liberties, congressional war powers, federalism, the free market, and the right to life. He is not a party-loyal rubber stamp — he is closer to the older American tradition of constitutional restraint, when Americans had stronger family values and family units.

This does not mean Massie is correct on every issue — although he has a [99-percent](#) lifetime freedom score — or that Trump has accomplished nothing conservative. Trump's judicial appointments, border policies, deregulation, and religious-liberty actions were meaningful. But conservatism cannot be reduced to winning policy battles while ignoring constitutional methods. If the Constitution is the standard, then how power is used matters as much as what is achieved.

The 2010 [Citizens United](#) Supreme Court decision was constitutionally correct in ruling that political spending is a form of free speech. Arguments could be made all day about who funds whom and who has donated to whom, but what truly matters is record over rhetoric. In other words, actions speak louder than words. Strip away personality and all the strings attached, and the question becomes: Who has the stronger record aligned with the Founders' intent for the Constitution?

The Constitution Makes a Conservative

If "conservative" simply means opposing the Left or appealing to Republican voters, then both Trump and Massie broadly qualify. But under a strict constitutional standard, the distinction is clear.

Trump is — for lack of a better term — conservative-adjacent. His record on spending, executive power,



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and constitutional order prevents him from fitting the full definition of a constitutional conservative.

Massie, by contrast, is a constitutional conservative. His record reflects limited government, fiscal restraint, federalism, civil liberties, war-powers accountability, free-market principles, and defense of life. He is not merely fighting for conservative outcomes; he is fighting within the constitutional framework that conservatives, and, frankly, all politicians, should seek to preserve.

In an age of personality-driven and influencer politics, Americans must remember that no man is bigger than the principles he claims to defend. The proper test is not loyalty to Trump, Massie, or any other political figure. The proper test is fidelity to God, as well as the Constitution, ordered liberty, moral truth, and the God-given rights that government exists to protect.



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