



Written by [Steven J. DuBord](#) on October 28, 2008

## The John Birch Society: 50 Years and Beyond

The John Birch Society, founded 50 years ago this December, recently celebrated its golden anniversary a bit early at a resort hotel located not far from its headquarters in Appleton, Wisconsin. This publication, an affiliate of the JBS, was of course a part of the three-day gala affair. Marking the occasion, we interviewed JBS Chief Executive Officer Art Thompson and President John F. McManus about the organization — past, present, and future.



**THE NEW AMERICAN:** *Fifty years in operation is quite a milestone for a grass-roots, member-based organization like the John Birch Society. What do you see as the organization's largest accomplishments?*

**Art Thompson:** Much of what we have accomplished has been off the radar of most Americans. They can often see the results, but not our involvement. Consider the campaign we launched in the '60s to "[Support Your Local Police](#) — And Keep Them Independent." Almost everyone is familiar with the "Support Your Local Police" part of our slogan — and the derivatives of it such as "Support Your Local Sheriff" — but how many recall that the John Birch Society originated the slogan? Or that the campaign blocked the early efforts to centralize police powers under Washington, D.C.? One of the campaign's most important victories was the abolition of the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration in 1983.

Another effort that has been largely off the radar screen has been our work over many decades to curtail judicial activism by using the means provided by the Constitution to rein in federal judges who trample on the Constitution. One means is impeachment, and many older Americans undoubtedly recall seeing our "Impeach Earl Warren" billboards during the early 1960s when the Supreme Court under Warren was running roughshod over the Constitution. Though Warren was not impeached, the campaign alerted many to the threat of judicial activism.



The JBS was also at one time almost alone in pointing to the congressional power to prohibit the jurisdiction of the federal courts from ruling on certain matters such as abortion or public display of the Ten Commandments. Over the years, the knowledge of this important congressional check on the federal judiciary has grown,



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and the House has even passed legislation to invoke this power.

Many Americans have seen our "Get US out! of the United Nations" billboards over the years without realizing the full extent of our "Get US out!" campaign. Between 1975 and 1982, the JBS delivered to Congress "Get US out!" petitions containing more than 11 million signatures. But even more important was the extraordinary educational work that was done to awaken Americans to the UN threat, including the educational work that was done while collecting signatures.

The educational groundwork we've laid about the UN, though largely under the radar, makes it much more difficult for internationalists to equip the world body with government powers supplanting our own laws. But the independence of our nation is also threatened by other entangling alliances, including the plan to create a North American Union for the United States, Mexico, and Canada. Built on the platform of NAFTA, the NAU would be modeled after the EU. As part of our campaign to stop the loss of our national independence through the NAFTA-NAU process, we have recently distributed over one million copies of *The New American's* "North American Union" special issue in either printed or electronic ([PDF](#)) form. And our members have led the efforts in many states to persuade state legislatures to adopt resolutions urging Congress to oppose the NAU.

The John Birch Society launched its "Impeach Clinton" campaign months before the Monica Lewinski scandal surfaced. Our principal case for impeachment was based on another, and far more serious, scandal known as "Chinagate," the undermining of U.S. national security in exchange for campaign cash. Though Clinton's impeachment was not based on Chinagate, it's likely the impeachment would not have occurred without the JBS paving the way. The *Washington Post* acknowledged that "early impeachment activists" included "the leaders of the John Birch Society," and that "together, their success is a demonstration of how a determined and ideologically committed group can change the course of history."

**John F. McManus:** Years ago, I can't remember exactly when, Robert Welch was asked what was the society's major accomplishment. He answered, "Staying alive." He meant that the JBS had survived the most withering and dishonest smear campaign ever directed against a citizen group in our nation's history.

To me, the most significant specific accomplishment I prefer to point to is our leadership role blocking a modern-day constitutional convention that could emasculate our Constitution or even write an entirely new Constitution, despite false claims that a constitutional convention can be limited to a single subject. In the 1980s, 32 states had called for a convention for the stated purpose of writing a balanced-budget amendment — just two states short of the number needed to trigger a convention. But JBS members led the effort to inform state legislators of the dangers of a runaway convention and many of the states withdrew their convention calls.

Our members also blocked a backdoor approach to a convention, led by then-Utah Governor Mike Leavitt, known as a Conference of the States. That was in 1994, and the *Salt Lake Tribune* acknowledged the success of our educational campaign by reporting that in "a span of just weeks, the John Birch Society has heaved the conference locomotive off-track."

There are, of course, many more accomplishments I could point to — but saving the Constitution is key!

**TNA:** *With JBS being founded in 1958 as an anti-communist organization, would you say that the focus has changed? If so, how?*



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**Thompson:** The focus has never changed if you are using individualism and liberty as that focus. We have always worked to preserve and restore the freedoms we have enjoyed in this great country of ours. That means supporting limited government under the Constitution. We have always opposed the threat of the Total State, which we know would devour our liberty, regardless of what the totalitarian threat might be called: communism, socialism, Nazism, or fascism. However, we have grown to realize that the totalitarian "isms" are only fingers on the same hand of an entity that wants total power but offers supposedly beneficial ideologies to mask its true ambitions and to beguile the masses. Of course, where regimes based on these ideologies have come to power, they have revealed their true colors and discredited their ideologies. But the same power elites continue to push for the Total State under other different guises. The Berlin Wall may have come down, but the threat of losing our freedoms to the Total State is as serious as ever.

**McManus:** Early members will recall that the JBS focus until 1966 was on the worldwide threat of communism stemming from Moscow. In 1966, JBS founder Robert Welch published his essay entitled [The Truth in Time](#) that traced the roots of communism in greater detail and concluded that communism was part of a larger, organized threat to our national independence and individual liberties. He introduced the term "Insiders" to refer to the members of the power elites who had been and are directing the overall effort to submerge our country into a new world order ruled by themselves. Capitalist elites who participate to consolidate economic and political power nationally and internationally oppose the free-enterprise system just as much as the communists do. Like the communists, non-communist elites also want power, and they recognize that their control of unbridled government would give them the ultimate monopoly.

**TNA:** *Congressman Ron Paul and Constitution Party presidential candidate Chuck Baldwin were featured speakers at the John Birch Society's 50th anniversary celebration. What is your policy on supporting candidates?*

**Thompson:** As an organization, we never endorse or contribute in any way toward political candidates, even if they are members of our society. Our members are free, indeed encouraged, to get involved in civic and political affairs, but we never make recommendations as to their partisan involvement.

McManus: The society has always believed that one reason it isn't necessary for the organization to endorse a candidate is simply because members already know who worthy candidates are. And candidates who meaningfully and believably support the U.S. Constitution always discover that Birchers will find them. And they do.

Beyond that, the educational work that is done by our members outside of elections impacts not only what happens on election day but the positions elected officials take and how they vote. The more informed the voters are, the better their decisions will be when they cast their votes. And an informed electorate will apply pressure on Congress during election years and non-election years alike to abide by the Constitution. Politicians who want to get reelected will pay attention to the wishes of their constituents.

**TNA:** *The motto of the John Birch Society is "Less government, more responsibility, and — with God's help — a better world." What has JBS done to achieve this? One would think that it is fighting a losing battle given the recent financial bailout.*

**Thompson:** Over the years, we have disseminated many millions of written words on the basics of good government and economics. In addition, we have hosted countless programs, seminars, and speakers on



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the same subjects. Our success has varied over the years, but it is obvious that we have not yet done enough.

**McManus:** Our nation certainly does suffer under more government, but the society's efforts over five decades have prevented the situation from being significantly worse.

The "more responsibility" part of the society's motto aims at building and maintaining adherence to moral principles — by governments, organizations and individuals. In 1970, Robert Welch published "The John Birch Resolutions" pointing to numerous "dos," for instance patriotism, family relationships, proper education of the young, etc., and numerous "don'ts," including abortion, stealing, lying, and immorality.

In general, the society believes that governments should be limited by law and persons should be limited by the freely accepted moral codes of history. That combination would, indeed, lead to a "better world."

**TNA:** *What would the world look like if the JBS had never been founded?*

**Thompson:** The world today would be a very bleak place without our society. Though it seems we have lost ground, the sum total of this effort has nonetheless prevented the total loss of our liberty. I cannot objectively prove this to be the case, in the sense that one can prove a mathematical theorem. But I firmly believe it, based on my many decades of association with the organization. Truth is a very powerful weapon, and that is the weapon Birchers use in the freedom fight.

**McManus:** I agree with Art: the answer to that question can only be a subjective assessment. After more than four decades of involvement with JBS, almost all of which have included serving on staff, including 13 years of close association with our founder Robert Welch, I too believe that a dark night of totalitarianism would have already engulfed the planet had JBS never been formed.

The society presented a form of organized opposition that the Insiders had never faced before. Our effort has caused them numerous setbacks. I cited earlier, for example, our leadership role in blocking a modern-day constitutional convention. And Art cited our organized opposition to a North American Union. This opposition has undoubtedly delayed the scheme to create a super-national government for North America.

**TNA:** *What does the world look like in another 50 years? Is JBS in it?*

**Thompson:** There are many who believe that the American dream is over. We heartily disagree.

We can find realistic hope for restoring that dream in the many layers of strength we see growing across this country. That does not mean that we will not go through some hard times or difficulties. But when we see so many young people who are not only concerned about the future, but concerned in the right way, this gives us great hope. It is simply a matter of organizing that hope, focusing it on the right solutions, and then prevailing. This will be the task of the John Birch Society, as it has been for the first 50 years of our existence.

**McManus:** It is my hope that even before another 50 years has elapsed, the American people will have replaced lawmakers who ignore or merely give lip service to the Constitution with lawmakers who understand the Constitution and abide by it. As the American people become better informed, some lawmakers, of course, will decide it is in their own best interest to abandon their advocacy of big government and internationalism in favor of limited government under the Constitution. When this



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occurs, the need for solid Americans who understand and abide by the limitations in the U.S. Constitution will have been filled. And the great majority of Americans will have returned to living by the moral underpinnings that so characterized our nation in its early years.

**TNA:** *How has the society kept up with the times?*

**Thompson:** We are constantly looking for new technology to keep us in the premier position in the movement to restore the Constitution. This not only includes the Internet but social networking and modern marketing techniques. In many ways, the rapid changes in technology keep us on our toes in order to stay up, so to speak. The main difference between us and the other organizations that look similar online is that our website is backed up by a substantial field organization. The John Birch Society could still function well, albeit not as rapidly, without the Web using the hands-on organization. This is not true for others.

**McManus:** I recall using heavy 16 mm film projectors and 35 mm filmstrip projectors accompanied by 33 rpm recordings. We advanced to tape recordings, then to video recordings and DVDs. From typewriters, we went to computers and the Internet. The technological changes have helped us to be more effective in the fast-paced age in which we live. But though technology changes, principles do not — and the society today supports the same basic principles it did at the time of its founding.

**TNA:** *What are the core issues of JBS?*

**Thompson:** Our core issues are based on our core principles: the Constitution, the Ten Commandments, and the wisdom underpinning both. We desire freedom and with freedom comes the responsibility to rule ourselves. Therefore, we involve ourselves in issues that threaten the Constitution and independence of our country, such as opposing the North American Union. The same holds true of our decades-long battle to get the United States out of the UN. We will oppose any issue that abrogates the ability of the American people to decide their own fate. Since a robust economy is essential to the well-being of Americans, we also have been opposing the so-called economic bailouts. These bailouts will make the problem worse in the long run and may well serve as the basis for the economic collapse of our country. Without elaboration, let me make the statement that both a country and an individual must be solvent, not only to survive, but to function as a free entity.

**McManus:** I would add preventing dilution of sovereignty through submission to a North American Union, exposure of the Insiders instead of ascribing destructiveness to stupidity or ignorance, nonintervention in the affairs and struggles of other nations accompanied by commercial relations with all who are honorable, retention of the God-given right to keep and bear arms, and a return to precious-metal currency, along with terminating the vise grip held over our nation's economic life by the Federal Reserve.

**TNA:** *Who was John Birch?*

**Thompson:** John Birch was a young Baptist missionary who went to China during the Sino-Japanese War. After Pearl Harbor, he volunteered his services to the commander of the Flying Tigers as a patriotic American, and due to his experience in China, he was commissioned as an Army intelligence officer. It was he who rescued Jimmy Doolittle after he flew off the deck of the carrier *Hornet* and bombed Tokyo.

John Birch served with distinction, earning several medals during the war. At the end of the war, while



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in command of a detachment tasked with determining the attitude of a military unit, he and his men were intercepted by Chinese communists, and he was killed.

**McManus:** John Birch was well-known throughout much of China as an opponent of communism and a leader of the Chinese people. He was obviously a threat to Mao Tse-tung's communist forces.

His life, which was extremely commendable, even heroic, led Robert Welch to write a small biography of the man in 1954 entitled *The Life of John Birch*. When the time came to form the John Birch Society, he asked John's parents if he could use their deceased son's name as a symbol for the organization. They happily gave permission, and both became members immediately.

**TNA:** *In a perfect JBS world, what does the government look like? What exactly are its functions?*

**Thompson:** Even in a not-so-perfect world, the government, on the federal level, would be 20 percent of what it is now. Parents would reassume responsibility for their children and their education — not the federal government. Free enterprise determines our energy policy — not the federal government. Insurance companies determine job safety — not the federal government. And so forth.

In a nutshell, it is the job of government to secure and protect our God-given rights, not be a super-nanny. To see that there is equal justice under the law for all, not just for the few. To protect our country from invasion, not have open borders or go looking for a fight.

**McManus:** No world can be "perfect," but it surely can be a lot better than what we have today. All that would be needed for our country to regain its preeminence would be a return to what the Founders established. They expressed the philosophical basis for the United States in the Declaration of Independence, which states that men "are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights," and that "to secure these Rights, Governments are instituted...."

Here we have a clear statement that rights come from God and the people who enjoy those rights have formed a government for the sole purpose of maintaining those rights. The role of government, therefore, should be negative, not positive. Government should not redistribute wealth, take charge of people's lives, or dominate their existence. It should protect each of us from each other, from foreign forces, and especially from government itself.

As for what kind of government, the best ever devised by mortal man is the American system under the Constitution of the United States. It limits government to the very few powers in keeping with the Declaration. The combination of the philosophical basis for our government provided by the Declaration and the creation of that government under the Constitution enabled our nation to become the envy of the world.

Regarding the rest of mankind, it is a stated objective of the John Birch Society to help other peoples in other lands through the power of persuasion to understand and adopt for themselves the system known as Americanism as briefly described above.

This would make a wonderful, though never perfect, world.

**TNA:** *What do you see as the greatest assets of JBS? Its greatest weaknesses?*

**Thompson:** The greatest asset of the JBS is its field organization. Without it, we would be little threat to the enemies of the Constitution. This is what has always set the JBS apart from the others. And, this is what has always created fear in the hearts of those who wish to rule us.



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**McManus:** I see as greatest assets of the society the ability to create awareness of past history (especially the glories of America) teaching and living the legacy of Robert Welch's wisdom, the tens of thousands of remarkable Americans already involved in JBS, the adherence to principle no matter what the cost in popularity, the track record of being correct even if virtually no one agreed until later, and the monolithic structure that keeps JBS from being taken off course.

Our largest weaknesses include lack of financial resources enabling the society to have a greater impact and the inability because of lack of sufficient clout to combat more effectively the falsities and distortions aimed daily at the American people by the mass media about the substantive issues of the day.

**TNA:** *What advice can you offer to those interested in learning more about JBS or its vision or game plan for restoring the Republic?*

**Thompson:** Go online to JBS.org. That is the short answer. Beyond that, there is some basic literature one can read to get a better understanding. Always begin with the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, then watch [Overview of America](#) DVD. Then read [The Federalist Papers](#) about the Constitution and [The Law](#) by Bastiat. These are the foundations of our system of government. Further, study the machinations of the enemies of the Constitution by reading [The Shadows of Power](#) and [The Insiders](#). Plus, there are several good videos that one can see as well.

But do not wait until you understand everything. Getting involved in solutions is far more meaningful than knowing everything. And the John Birch Society offers solutions.

**McManus:** We urge all to take a good hard look at the John Birch Society. Look beyond the various smears the society has endured. Rarely do we encounter prospects for JBS membership who aren't grateful for what they learn from us, what they are reminded about from some schooling they encountered, and what they understand must be done to save the country for themselves and the next generations.

We always hope that an understanding of the society's views will lead to membership in our "epic undertaking." To say that each American owes it to himself and his family to examine JBS is our summation. What anyone does after that is entirely up to each individual.

Let me also add that I think the society can and will succeed based on the firm belief that "history is made by the dedicated few - for good or for evil." We certainly believe that we can bring about that era of "less government, more responsibility, and — with God's help — a better world."

Without doubt, there exist a dedicated few conspiring to create totalitarian rule by themselves over all of mankind. History is full of those who wanted to rule the planet. But history also contains tales of a few here or a few there who saved their country, even their continent. Most of the heroic tales of the past have involved military victories. But what faces civilization today is not a military struggle. Instead, it is war for the minds and hearts of mankind, a war waged with lies, deception, bribery, and appeals to baseness. It must be fought with truth, openness, honor, and morality.

To say that this war cannot be won is to virtually guarantee that it won't be won. So to those who are already involved in this great undertaking, I offer congratulations and thanks. And to those who are not involved, I repeat what Robert Welch so often said to his audiences and readers, "Come join us in our proud companionship and in our epic undertaking."



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