

Rob Smith

Opening Statement
Government Operations Subcommittee
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Good morning Honorable Chair, Ranking Member and honorable members of this committee. I'm Rob Smith, a U.S. Army veteran and proud Black conservative.

I grew up in the working-class community of Akron Ohio and was raised by a single mother. Although we didn't have much money or access to a whole lot of resources, she worked very hard to provide for her children.

Like many who grew up in Akron, I attended some of the lowest performing and underfunded schools in my neighborhood. Disaffected teachers would routinely come to class unprepared, and my counselors had little idea of what to do with a student who quite obviously didn't have an athletic scholarship ready for him upon graduation.

What we did have in our poor, working class neighborhood, however, was a strong sense of community and an undying belief in self.

The figureheads, parents, and activists of my day always spoke positively of a brighter future—one where they'd have successfully passed on the torch of leadership and hope of opportunity to us, so that we could pave the way for additional successes just like our forefathers and mothers had done for us.

That undying belief in the ability for us human beings—each of us all endowed with great gifts—to continuously improve and better our circumstances and the world around us, is what drove me to better myself and to serve my country. I graduated from high school near the top of my class and decided to serve my country as an Infantryman in the United States Army, having been deployed to both Kuwait and Iraq.

I credit the time that I spent in the Army with building the unshakable belief that I have in myself. It was those years that taught me that I'm not a victim, that there is nothing that I cannot achieve, and that I'm in the best place that I could possibly be at to achieve it: The United States of America. I joined the military because I love my country, and because it offered a working-class kid like me the ability to see the world far beyond the confines of Akron, Ohio. It offered me The American Dream.

Today, I'm a political analyst who has provided commentary on several major news networks including CNN and Fox News. I have met the last two Presidents of the United States. I have met Ambassadors, congressmen and women, and Senators. I advocate for veterans rights and was a guest of President Barack Obama during the repeal ceremony of "Don't Ask Don't Tell" - the law which barred service from military members who were openly Lesbian, Gay, or Bisexual. I received my Master's Degree from Columbia University and am now contributor to several reputable online publications. In May, I will publish a memoir of the time I spent in the United States Army and my deployment to Iraq.



I am living a life far beyond what my high school education and upbringing would have suggested, and I wouldn't have been able to accomplish any of these things had my mentality and beliefs about "self" been any different.

If I had succumbed to the *soft bigotry* of low expectations, or to any of the rhetoric from elected officials who wished to substitute the role that strong individuals and communities play in supporting each other with that of an all-powerful, unaccountable and bloated government, where would I be today? Granted, it wasn't until I started to reject the messages that seek to take control and responsibility out of the hands of the individual and put that into the government, that I saw my greatest personal and career successes.

That's a question we all should ask ourselves. Who and where would we be if the people worked for the government and not the government for the people? Just a few decades ago, such an existence would have been infeasible in the communities where I come from. No one wants their lives dictated by the government. It's the exact antithesis of the values that have made our country great. Yes, I have family members who remain on government assistance. I have seen firsthand how the government can easily take on the role of 'father' in the household, and the destruction and dysfunction that can cause. After a long and steady drumbeat by this latest flock of so-called progressives, people have unfortunately come to believe that more government may actually be a solution to their problems.

A casual glance at the economy under President Trump suggests otherwise. Since his first days in office, the President has worked to unlock the economy by removing regulatory burdens from small business owners and entrepreneurs so they can continue to innovate in the diverse communities where they live, work, and play. I have seen Black small business owners that I myself patronize thrive in this economy.

Objectively, we can see the results: Poverty is on the decline, the Black unemployment rate is the lowest it's been in recorded history, and the stock-market has experienced an unprecedented rally that's undoubtedly been good for the retirements of working-class American families. The proof is right in front of us for all to see. Why would we want to change course?

Even those who advocate for socialism continue to reap the benefits of the greatest economy this generation has seen, and for some odd reason they are intent on destroying it. For those who fight against our free market economy, which has continued to lift millions out of poverty, the question is why?

Sure, there's nothing wrong with helping those in need. As President Trump has said, we can't just leave people on the streets. I agree. But, the purpose of the safety net was never dependency, it was transition. We need to get back to transition, not reliance. And, we need to start telling our youth that their worlds aren't ending, but that they are just beginning. I wholeheartedly reject the idea that unchecked, ever-expanding, and limitless government assistance is the way to build thriving members of American society. While these arguments are often framed in today's society in explicitly racial terms, I believe those arguments miss the point. Americans of ALL colors should be given



the opportunity for success, and I fundamentally do not believe that expanding government intervention in their homes and lives is the way to do so.

The trusts of our collective futures cannot and should not be based on entitlements, they should be based on endeavor in every form. The endeavor to build a business. The endeavor to pursue higher or technical education to better oneself. The endeavor that I took on - to come out of one of the lowest-performing high schools in Ohio, serve my country honorably, and share my personal reasons as to why I think less - not more - government intervention will imbue Americans just like me with the tools to succeed. With that, members of the committee, I would be happy to answer any question that you may have.

