



RONALD REAGAN: NORTH STAR OF THE CONSERVATIVE REVOLUTION

On this anniversary of President [Ronald Wilson Reagan's](#) birthday, we remember him for his extraordinary leadership, wit and wisdom -- and for living the quintessential success story.

President Reagan was born in Tampico, Illinois, a town with a few hundred residents. His family had modest means, and instilled him with timeless Christian virtues and Mid-American values. "Dutch," as his father nicknamed him, attended Dixon High School and Eureka College, where between economics and sociology classes, and football, he became interested in acting. After college, he became a sports radio announcer, and on a trip to California with the Chicago Cubs in 1937 he took a screen test that landed him a seven-year contract with Warner Brothers.

That same year, he enlisted in the Army Reserve and was assigned to the 323rd Cavalry.

Before World War II, Reagan had roles in more than 20 films, including a leading role in "Knut Rockne, All American" as George Gipp, from which he acquired the lifelong nickname, "The Gipper." During the War, he was classified for limited duty because of poor eyesight, and was assigned to public relations for the Army Air Force. Captain Reagan's unit made more than 400 AAF promotional films before the end of the war.

In 1947, Reagan was elected to lead a powerful union, the Screen Actors Guild, and his political perspective was further refined by controversies over Communist influence in the motion picture industry. In the years that followed, Reagan became an articulate and outspoken conservative, though still a Democrat.

In 1962, he became a Republican, saying, "I didn't leave the Democratic Party. The party left me." I suspect the President could not imagine how far to the left his [once-great Democratic Party](#) would free fall by 2008, and how many of his countrymen would go along for the ride.

In 1964, Reagan delivered the nomination speech for Barry Goldwater at the Republican Convention, "[A Time for Choosing](#)," and it became, and remains, the quintessential battle order for conservatives: "The Founding Fathers knew a government can't control the economy without controlling people. And they knew when a government sets out to do that, it must use force and coercion to achieve its purpose. So we have come to a time for choosing..."

Two years later he won a landslide election to become governor of California, and won re-election in 1970. As governor, he promoted free enterprise and limited government.

One of his most public challenges was confronting massive leftwing movements at institutions like Berkeley, where the radical ideologies of Barack Obama's mentors were refined. Of that ragtag lot, Reagan quipped, "Their signs said make love, not war, but they didn't look like they could do either."

In 1980, Ronald Reagan was elected President of our great nation, winning 44 states and 489 electoral votes versus Jimmy Carter's six states and 49 electoral votes.

In 1984, only 25 years ago, Ronald Reagan won re-election by historic margins, receiving almost 60 percent of the popular vote and a record 525 of a possible 538 electoral votes -- winning every state but Minnesota, the home state of his opponent Walter Mondale.

To those of us who were (and remain) Reagan's most devoted disciples, 1984 seems like just yesterday, because the president's platform and record were grounded in the [timeless principles](#) that have sustained our nation through the most difficult of times.

When Reagan defeated Carter in 1980, the nation was in a severe economic crisis. We faced an energy crisis, and something worse than recession alone -- a period of economic stagnancy coupled with skyrocketing inflation -- "stagflation," as the Carter-induced condition became known.

Reagan entered office with inflation at almost 14 percent and unemployment soaring into double digits. It took President Reagan several years to restore free-market principles -- tax reduction, deregulation and sound monetary policy -- that would sustain the largest peacetime economic surge in American history.

Unfortunately, Reagan was saddled with a Democrat-controlled House for all his years in office, and they refused to cut government spending for social welfare programs. The consequences were twofold: First, millions of Democrat constituents remained dependent on those programs; and second, it fueled growing deficits.

Democrats, of course, point to military spending as the culprit -- spending which drove the "Evil Empire" into collapse -- but had social spending cuts kept pace with tax reductions, and had Democrats not tried to [socially engineer the housing market](#), we might still be enjoying a healthy economy today.

Typical of great statesmen, Ronald Reagan took no credit for our nation's recovery during his tenure. He was called "The Great Communicator" because he almost single-handedly restored the nation's confidence. Indeed, what we're experiencing now is, first and foremost, [a crisis of confidence](#).

"I wasn't a great communicator," President Reagan said in his farewell address, "but I communicated

great things, and they didn't spring full bloom from my brow, they came from the heart of a great nation -- from our experience, our wisdom, and our belief in the principles that have guided us for two centuries."

He added, "There were two great triumphs ... that I'm proudest of. One is the economic recovery, in which the people of America created -- and filled -- 19 million new jobs. The other is the recovery of our morale. America is respected again in the world and looked to for leadership."

The day before George H.W. Bush was elected, Reagan reassured those of us who suspected Bush would fumble the ball: "[Though] my name isn't on your ballot tomorrow, something more important is: a principle, a legacy. No, this is not the end of an era; it's a time to refresh and strengthen the new beginning we started eight years ago. ... I hope that someday your children and grandchildren will tell of the time that a certain president came to town at the end of a long journey and asked their parents and grandparents to join him in setting America on the course to the new millennium, and that a century of peace, prosperity, opportunity and hope had followed."

Unfortunately, Bush did fumble the ball right into Bill Clinton's hands, and he ran it all the way for a touchdown.

By 1993, a frequently heard complaint from dwindling conservative circles was that the Reagan era had ended. One thing is certain: The only hint of Republican leadership (now an oxymoron) since Reagan left office, which rose to his standard, was the 1994 Contract with America, when a new Republican-controlled Congress was called to order by Newt Gingrich. Gingrich fulfilled almost all of that Contract's mandates, but his lieutenants got lazy and, by the turn of the millennium, there were only about 100 Reagan Republicans remaining in the House, and maybe 20 in the Senate.

During his two terms as president, George W. Bush shined as a commander in chief, cut our taxes, and seated two sterling Supreme Court justices. Despite

this, he failed to lead on the domestic front, and we now find ourselves with a failing economy, and, worse, executive and legislative branches of government controlled by the most liberal politicians in the history of our Republic.

The GAO estimates that unemployment may exceed nine percent by 2010, and the Democrats are proposing to print almost a trillion dollars to distribute to their constituencies, ostensibly for "economic recovery." If you think that's a big bailout, keep in mind that from 1919 to 2006, no government bailout exceeded the \$8 billion capital infusion by the Fed during the 1986 savings and loan crisis. That's eight billion versus one-thousand billion. One can only surmise how much inflation it will take to absorb the distribution of all that cash.

So, is the Reagan era over -- has his ["Conservative Mandate"](#) expired? Is free enterprise going to be irrevocably supplanted by the [Demonic](#) of trickle-up poverty?

Too many Republicans have ventured down the path of destruction laid by Democrats -- Democrats who long ago abandoned our Founders' legacy of freedom and liberty. In doing so, they have succumbed to the allure of unmitigated power and self-aggrandizement.

But all is not lost -- far from it.

There is still a tenacious group of Reagan conservatives in Congress -- about the same strength in ranks as existed when Bush (43) was elected in 2000.

In the House, they form the [Republican Study Committee](#). Along with their Senate colleagues, these folks have kept the flame of our nation's "First Principles" shining bright.

They are devoted to individual liberty, the restoration of constitutional limits on government and the judiciary, and the promotion of free enterprise, national defense and traditional American values.

Increasingly, wayward Republicans, now relegated to the back of the bus, are taking a hard look at where they are and how they got there. With the help of those resolute conservatives who have remained steadfast in their allegiance and loyalty to their oaths, there is a resurgence in the ranks of House and Senate members who are refocusing on the North Star of the Republican Party: Ronald Reagan.

That resurgence was in evidence last week, as House Republicans voted unanimously against the Democrat's 600-page stimulus proposal that handed out an average of \$1.6 billion per page. Although 11 thoughtful Democrats joined Republicans, the measure still passed 244-to-188. But that's a start.

Beyond the Beltway, there's a much larger and more tenacious group of [American Patriots](#), and they stand ready for leadership to emerge from the ranks of those Republicans.

In "A Time for Choosing," Reagan issued a clarion call: "It's time we asked ourselves if we still know the freedoms intended for us by the Founding Fathers. James Madison said, 'We base all our experiments on the capacity of mankind for self government.' This idea -- that government was beholden to the people, that it had no other source of power -- is still the newest, most unique idea in all the long history of man's relation to man. This is the issue of this election: Whether we believe in our capacity for self-government or whether we abandon the American Revolution and confess that a little intellectual elite in a far-distant capital can plan our lives for us better than we can plan them ourselves."

He continued, "You and I are told increasingly that we have to choose between a Left or Right, but I would like to suggest that there is no such thing as a Left or Right. There is only an up or down -- up to a man's age-old dream, the ultimate in individual freedom consistent with law and order -- or down to the ant heap totalitarianism, and regardless of their sincerity, their humanitarian motives, those who would trade our freedom for security have embarked on this downward course."

Indeed, we are now at another time for choosing.

["A Time for Choosing"](#) and the 1984 Republican Platform are templates to lead the nation back to economic and moral prosperity, and Ronald Reagan's victory in that year is ample affirmation of that.

Thank you, President Reagan, and may all Patriots heed your warning: "As government expands, liberty contracts." God bless you, sir.