



## THE REAGAN CENTENNIAL

"No man can well doubt the propriety of placing a president of the United States under the most solemn obligations to preserve, protect, and defend the constitution." --Joseph Story

February 6, 2011, marks the Reagan Centennial, or as President [Ronald Wilson Reagan](#) would have phrased it, the 61st anniversary of his 39th birthday. The observance of this occasion provides a vital bond with our national heritage of Liberty, and those who have devoted their lives and fortunes to advance it.



There is much to recall about the Reagan Legacy.

Our 40th president was the CEO of the [modern Conservative Revolution](#) and arguably the most influential political figure of the 20th century.

I first met President Reagan in 1983. I was three inches taller than he, but the President seemed a couple of feet taller than me. He remains the warmest and most genuine public figure I have ever encountered; yet his resolve left no doubt that he was stronger than the most formidable enemy.

My undergraduate years coincided with the "great malaise" of Jimmy Carter's administration. Having met Mr. Carter and traveled with him in close quarters, I would describe him much as I would

Barack Hussein Obama: He was underwhelming, inept, anemic, misguided and ill-equipped for prime time. In short, he stood in stark contrast to the man who would succeed him.

Over the last 30 years, I have read most of what Ronald Reagan wrote in letters, as well as what he said in public radio and television commentaries, national addresses and political speeches. In addition, I have delved into more obscure records, such as the archived proceedings of national security meetings; these really provided a glimpse of his brilliance. I have also read a fair amount of what has been written about President Reagan.

It is not possible to capture the spirit of this man in multiple volumes, much less a single essay, but I have selected a few of his words, which I think best exemplify his exceptional character, his loyalty to and love of our country, his humility, his affection for the American people, his fortitude, his authentic devotion to constitutional liberty and Rule of Law, his indisputable wisdom, his contagious optimism and his vision for the future.

(For a brief biographical sketch of Ronald Reagan, context necessary to understand his depth of character, link to this [Reagan Portrait](#).)

The bookends of Ronald Reagan's advocacy are his 1964 speech, "[A Time For Choosing](#)," which defined his political philosophy and challenged the American people to restore [Essential Liberty](#), and his [announcement](#) 30 years later that he had been diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease.

### 1964

In "The Speech," Reagan said, "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. ... You and I are told we must choose between a left or right, but I suggest there is no such thing as a left or right, there is only an up or down. Up to man's age-old dream -- the maximum of individual freedom consistent with order -- or down to the ant heap of totalitarianism. ... 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 concluded, "You and I have a rendezvous with destiny."

### 1977

In 1977, Reagan outlined a plan for "[The New Republican Party](#)," stating, "The principles of conservatism are sound because they are based on what men and women have discovered through experience in not just one generation or a dozen, but in all the combined experience of mankind. When we conservatives say that we know something about political affairs, and what we know can be stated as principles, we are saying that the principles we hold dear are those that have been found, through experience, to be ultimately beneficial for individuals, for families, for communities and for nations -- found through the often bitter testing of pain, or sacrifice and sorrow."

He continued: "We, the members of the New Republican Party, believe that the preservation and enhancement of the values that strengthen and protect individual freedom, family life, communities and neighborhoods and the liberty of our beloved nation

should be at the heart of any legislative or political program presented to the American people.

"Families must continue to be the foundation of our nation. Families -- not government programs -- are the best way to make sure our children are properly nurtured, our elderly are cared for, our cultural and spiritual heritages are perpetuated, our laws are observed and our values are preserved. ... We fear the government may be powerful enough to destroy our families; we know that it is not powerful enough to replace them.

"Extreme taxation, excessive controls, oppressive government competition with business ... frustrated minorities and forgotten Americans are not the products of free enterprise. They are the residue of centralized bureaucracy, of government by a self-anointed elite.

"Our party must be based on the kind of leadership that grows and takes its strength from the people. ... And our cause must be to rediscover, reassert and reapply America's spiritual heritage to our national affairs. Then with God's help we shall indeed be as a city upon a hill with the eyes of all people upon us."

### 1980

In his 1980 presidential campaign, Reagan famously asked the American people, "Are you better off than you were four years ago?" He added, "A recession is when your neighbor loses his job. A depression is when you lose yours. And recovery is when Jimmy Carter loses his." (Substitute Obama for Carter and, in the inimitable words of Yogi Berra, "It's déjà vu all over again.")

Reagan defeated Carter in the general election, carrying 44 states. He took his oath of office with his hand on his mother's Bible. It was open to a passage from which he read: "If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land." (2 Chronicles 7:14) In the margin

next to that verse, Nelle Reagan had written, "A most wonderful verse for the healing of the nations."

In his 1981 inaugural address, President Reagan reassured a needful nation: "The economic ills we suffer ... will not go away in days, weeks, or months, but they will go away. They will go away because we, as Americans, have the capacity now, as we have had in the past, to do whatever needs to be done to preserve this last and greatest bastion of freedom. In this present crisis, government is not the solution to our problem; government is the problem."

During his first term, he restored the nation's confidence, corrected the economy's course by implementing supply-side principles, survived an assassination attempt, restored funding to increase our military capability and refused to bow to the "Evil Empire," the Soviet Union. He reinvigorated the debate about the constitutional role of government, taxes and government spending.

Reagan was re-elected in 1984, winning 49 of 50 states, losing only Minnesota, the home state of his opponent Walter Mondale, Carter's former vice president -- and by only 3,800 votes at that. Oh, and of course, he lost the District of Columbia.

His second term was plagued with distractions, but one crowning achievement eclipsed them all. Under Reagan, we won the Cold War.



USS Ronald Reagan,  
CVN76

President Reagan's Cold War victory is perhaps best captured by the words he spoke at the Berlin Wall on 12 June 1987. Reagan symbolically challenged the USSR's General Secretary, Mikhail

Gorbachev: "If you seek peace, if you seek prosperity for the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, if you seek liberalization, come here to this gate! Mr. Gorbachev, open this gate! Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!"

The dismantling of the Berlin Wall began in 1989, and in 1991, the Soviet Union collapsed. In the end, Mikhail Gorbachev expressed both respect and a great fondness for Reagan.

### 1989

President Reagan delivered his [farewell address](#) to the American people on 11 January 1989.

"It's been the honor of my life to be your president. So many of you have written the past few weeks to say thanks, but I could say as much to you. ... It's been quite a journey this decade, and we held together through some stormy seas. And at the end, together, we are reaching our destination. ... The lesson of all this was, of course, that because we're a great nation, our challenges seem complex. It will always be this way. But as long as we remember our First Principles and believe in ourselves, the future will always be ours. ...

"Almost all the world's constitutions are documents in which governments tell the people what their privileges are. Our Constitution is a document in which 'We the People' tell the government what it is allowed to do. 'We the People' are free. This belief has been the underlying basis for everything I've tried to do these past eight years. ...

"I hope we have once again reminded people that man is not free unless government is limited. There's a clear cause and effect here that is as neat and predictable as a law of physics: As government expands, liberty contracts. ...

"Action is still needed, if we're to finish the job. An informed patriotism is what we want. And are we doing a good enough job teaching our children what America is and what she represents in the long history of the world? Those of us who are over 35 or so years of age grew up in a different America. We were taught, very directly, what it means to be an American. And we absorbed, almost in the air, a love of country and an appreciation of its institutions. ...



"I wasn't a great communicator, 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. They called it the Reagan Revolution. Well, I'll accept that, but for me it always seemed like the Great Rediscovery -- a rediscovery of our values and our common sense. ...

"Goodbye, God bless you, and God bless the United States of America."

In his [1992 address to the Republican National Convention](#), Ronald Reagan said, "And whatever else history may say about me when I'm gone, I hope it will record that I appealed to your best hopes, not your worst fears, to your confidence rather than your doubts. My dream is that you will travel the road ahead with Liberty's lamp guiding your steps and Opportunity's arm steadying your way. My fondest hope for each one of you -- and especially for young people -- is that you will love your country, not for her power or wealth, but for her selflessness and her idealism. May each of you have the heart to conceive, the understanding to direct, and the hand to execute works that will make the world a little better for your having been here. May all of you as Americans never forget your heroic origins, never fail to seek divine guidance, and never lose your natural, God-given optimism. And finally, my fellow Americans, may every dawn be a great new beginning for America and every evening bring us closer to that shining city upon a hill."

Ronald Wilson Reagan *did* appeal to the best in us.

Today, however, the Left once again is appealing to the worst in their constituents -- fears, doubts, helpless

dependence upon the state, greed, envy, brokenness and pessimism.

Of Reagan's legacy, Barack Obama recently wrote, "Reagan understood that while we may see the world differently and hold different opinions about what's best for our country, the fact remains that we are all patriots who put the welfare of our fellow citizens above all else."

No, Mr. Obama, President Reagan would *never* have considered you a "patriot."

Obama desperately attempted to appear "Reaganesque" in his latest [SOTU](#), but that charade fell flat.

Reagan described in his autobiography in 1990 precisely where Obama has led our nation 20 years later: "We had strayed a great distance from our Founding Fathers' vision of America. They regarded the central government's responsibility as that of providing national security, protecting our democratic freedoms, and limiting the government's intrusion in our lives -- in sum, the protection of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. They never envisioned vast agencies in Washington telling our farmers what to plant, our teachers what to teach, our industries what to build. The Constitution they wrote established sovereign states, not mere administrative districts for the federal government. They believed in keeping government as close as possible to the people."

#### 1994

In August 1994, at the age of 83, Reagan announced that he was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. He closed his [public letter](#) with these words: "Let me thank you, the American people, for giving me the great honor of allowing me to serve as your president. When



the Lord calls me home, whenever that day may be, I will leave with the greatest love for this country of ours and eternal optimism for its future. I now begin the journey that will lead me into the sunset of my life. I know that for America there will always be a bright dawn ahead. Thank you, my friends. May God always bless you."

That year, Mrs. Reagan sent the founders of [PatriotPost.US](http://PatriotPost.US) a personal note, which concluded, "I am so grateful for all you have done for our nation. Ronnie felt, as do I, that his administration's success at home and abroad was due, in part, to your efforts. The President, and all Americans, remain deeply indebted to you. Thank you for keeping Liberty's lamp burning bright."

Mrs. Reagan, it is us, and all Americans, who owe President Reagan an inestimable debt of gratitude for his leadership and legacy in support of [Essential Liberty](#). In fact *The Patriot Post's* [mission statement](#) was crafted from his vision, under the guidance of his former White House adviser, Lyn Nofziger, the "North Star" of the Reagan Revolution. Lyn most enjoyed how we "cut down to size the pompous praters and propagandists on the left."

We know that President Reagan is smiling upon the renewed grassroots assemblage embodied in the [Tea Party movement](#), demanding the restoration of constitutional integrity.

His understanding of "endowed by our Creator with certain unalienable Rights" was aptly represented in his observation, "America needs God more than God needs America. If we ever forget that we are One Nation Under God, then we will be a Nation gone under." His eternal optimism was best captured in these words to our nation, "America's best days are yet to come. Our proudest moments are yet to be. Our most glorious achievements are just ahead."

Indeed!

Job well done good and faithful servant. Rest in peace.

Footnote: "The vision and legacy of the Reagan Revolution flourish on the pages of *The Patriot Post*." (Michael Reagan) For excellent resources on Ronald Reagan, link to [Reagan Portrait](#), and for a comprehensive collection of Reagan speeches, link to [Reagan2020](#), a site dedicate to his perfect vision for America in its third century, and its implementation by the years 2020.