

## Ronald Reagan: Acceptance Speech, Republican National Convention (1980)

*Ronald Reagan (1911-2004), once a liberal Democratic supporter of Franklin D. Roosevelt and Harry S. Truman, moved into the conservative Republican camp during the 1950s. His support of Barry Goldwater in 1964 contributed to his own nomination for governor of California two years later. Elected, he won a second term in 1970. Twice unsuccessful in bids for the Republican presidential nomination (1968, 1976), Reagan triumphed in 1980 and went on to trounce Jimmy Carter in the general election.*

Source: Excerpt from Ronald Reagan, Acceptance Speech, Republican National Convention, Detroit, Michigan, July 17, 1980. Permission is granted for electronic copying, distribution in print form for educational purposes and personal use.

### Address Accepting the Presidential Nomination at the Republican National Convention in Detroit July 17, 1980

*Mr. Chairman, Mr. Vice President to be, this convention, my fellow citizens of this great nation:*

...This convention has shown to all America a party united, with positive programs for solving the nation's problems; a party ready to build a new consensus with all those across the land who share a community of values embodied in these words: family, work, neighborhood, peace and freedom... More than anything else, I want my candidacy to unify our country; to renew the American spirit and sense of purpose. I want to carry our message to every American, regardless of party affiliation...

The major issue of this campaign is the direct political, personal and moral responsibility of Democratic Party leadership--in the White House and in Congress--for this unprecedented calamity which has befallen us. They tell us they have done the most that humanly could be done. They say that the United States has had its day in the sun; that our nation has passed its zenith. They expect you to tell your children that the American people no longer have the will to cope with their problems; that the future will be one of sacrifice and few opportunities.

My fellow citizens, I utterly reject that view. The American people, the most generous on earth, who created the highest standard of living, are not going to accept the notion that we can only make a better world for others by moving backwards ourselves. Those who believe we can have no business leading the nation...

Isn't it once again time to renew our compact of freedom... Together, let us make this a new beginning. Let us make a commitment to care for the needy; to teach our children the values and the virtues handed down to us by our families; to have the courage to defend those values and the willingness to sacrifice for them.

Let us pledge to restore... the American spirit of voluntary service, of cooperation, of private and community initiative; a spirit that flows like a deep and mighty river through the history of our nation.

... I pledge to restore to the federal government the capacity to do the people's work without dominating their lives. I pledge to you a government that will not only work well, but wisely; its ability to act tempered by prudence and its willingness to do good balanced by the knowledge that government is never more dangerous than when our desire to have it help us blinds us to its great power to harm us...

Those who preside over the worst energy shortage in our history tell us to use less, so that we will run out of oil, gasoline, and natural gas a little more slowly. Conservation is desirable, of course, for we must not waste energy. But conservation is not the sole answer to our energy needs.

America must get to work producing more energy. The Republican program for solving economic problems is based on growth and productivity. Large amounts of oil and natural gas lay beneath our land and off our shores, untouched because the present administration seems to believe the American people would rather see more regulation, taxes and controls than more energy. Coal offers great potential. So does nuclear energy produced under rigorous safety standards...

Make no mistake. We will not permit the safety of our people or our environment heritage to be jeopardized, but we are going to reaffirm that the economic prosperity of our people is a fundamental part of our environment...

#### Questions:

1. What was Ronald Reagan's view of the proper relationship between the federal government and the American people?
2. What was Reagan's prescription for curing the ills of the American economy?
3. Do you think Reagan's appeal to the voters had more to do with the perceived failings of the Democrats or the Republican Party's conservative agenda?

It is essential that we maintain both the forward momentum of economic growth and the strength of the safety net beneath those in society who need help. We also believe it is essential that the integrity of all aspects of Social Security are preserved.

Beyond these essentials, I believe it is clear our federal government is overgrown and overweight. Indeed, it is time for our government to go on a diet. Therefore, my first act as chief executive will be to impose an immediate and thorough freeze on federal hiring. Then, we are going to enlist the very best minds from business, labor and whatever quarter to conduct a detailed review of every department, bureau and agency that lives by federal appropriations...

Our instructions to the groups we enlist will be simple and direct. We will remind them that government programs exist at the sufferance of the American taxpayer and are paid for with money earned by working men and women. Any program that represents a waste of their money... must have that waste eliminated or the program must go... Everything that can be run more effectively by state and local government we shall turn over to state and local government, along with the funding sources to pay for it...

I will not accept the excuse that the federal government has grown so big and powerful that it is beyond the control of any president, any administration or Congress. We are going to put an end to the notion that the American taxpayer exists to fund the federal government. The federal government exists to serve the American people...

The American people are carrying the heaviest peacetime tax burden in our nation's history -- and it will grow even heavier, under present law, next January. We are taxing ourselves into economic exhaustion and stagnation, crushing our ability and incentive to save, invest and produce. This must stop. We must halt this fiscal self-destruction and restore sanity to our economic system...

A phased reduction of tax rates would go a long way toward easing the heavy burden on the American people. But, we should not stop here... For those without skills, we'll find a way to help them get skills. For those without job opportunities, we'll stimulate new opportunities, particularly in the inner cities where they live. For those who have abandoned hope, we'll restore hope and we'll welcome them into a great national crusade to make America great again!

... Tonight, let us dedicate ourselves to renewing the American compact. I ask you not simply to "Trust me," but to trust your values--our values--and to hold me responsible for living up to them. I ask you to trust that American spirit which knows no ethnic, religious, social, political, regional, or economic boundaries; the spirit that burned with zeal in the hearts of millions of immigrants from every corner of the Earth who came here in search of freedom...

I have thought of something that is not part of my speech and I'm worried over whether I should do it. Can we doubt that only a Divine Providence placed this land, this island of freedom, here as a refuge for all those people in the world who yearn to breathe freely: Jews and Christians enduring persecution behind the Iron Curtain, the boat people of Southeast Asia, of Cuba and Haiti, the victims of drought and famine in Africa, the freedom fighters of Afghanistan and our own countrymen held in savage captivity.

I'll confess that I've been a little afraid to suggest what I'm going to suggest--I'm more afraid not to--that we begin our crusade joined together in a moment of silent prayer.

God bless America.