

Ronald Reagan's Legacy Lives On Via Conservative Events

By Deroy Murdock

“SO HELP ME GOD.”

With those words, Ronald Reagan became the 40th president of the United States, and I was there to see the whole thing. At age 17, I had flown to Washington, D.C., with two high school friends from Los Angeles for what was my first trip to the East Coast. We three Reaganites—who had volunteered for the 1980 GOP nominee—saw the fruits of our early work in the conservative vineyards: Our hero was now leader of the free world. From our seats on the west lawn of the U.S. Capitol that day, we never imagined that in less than nine years, the free world would include East Berlin and, soon thereafter, Moscow itself.

President Reagan was inaugurated on January 20, 1981. The silver anniversary of the Reagan Era affords free-market activists a perfect opportunity to remind Americans of Ronald Reagan's seminal contribution to the advancement of the ideas of American liberty: individual freedom, personal responsibility, limited government, free enterprise, and peace through strength. The anniversary of the president's birth date, February 6, 1911, also gives activists a chance each year to celebrate these principles and the many ways Ronald Wilson Reagan increased their influence on American life.

Ironically, this has become a pivotal time once again to reassert the tenets of Reaganism.

Overseas, the good news is that Commu-

nism—save for the Marxist museums of Cuba and North Korea—has been relegated “to the ash heap of history,” just as President Reagan promised. The People's Republic of China, Earth's most populous Communist power, is a nominally Maoist state that nonetheless practices frontier capitalism and grows at roughly eight percent annually.

The bad news, however, is that the Marxist-Leninist threat to Western Civilization has been replaced with an elusive and perhaps more vociferous foe: Islamo-fascism. While al-Qaeda, Abu Sayyaf, Hezbollah, and other Muslim extremists lack the intercontinental ballistic missiles that helped the Soviet Union menace America and its allies, they also lack the physical location and sense of self-preservation that deterred the men in the Kremlin from striking the USA. Ronald Reagan knew where Leonid Brezhnev and Mikhail Gorbachev lived, and neither Russian premier was eager to die. Consequently, Brezhnev recognized, and Gorbachev ultimately yielded to, America's superior military and economic power.

Osama bin Laden and his cohorts are even tougher customers. They possess neither return addresses, nor much interest in living for another day. Only a ruthlessness and determination paralleling or even exceeding that of President Reagan can hurl today's enemies onto the ash heap on which they belong.





Deroy Murdock greets President Reagan and First Lady Nancy Reagan in 1985.

At home, a Republican Congress and a Republican White House were supposed to reinvigorate the cause of limited government. Instead, Republicans have teamed up since 2001 to accelerate federal spending to levels unseen since Lyndon Johnson's Great Society. As conservatives and libertarians watched aghast, a 2002 farm bill exploded with new subsidies, and a 2005 highway bill rode into law carrying 6,371 pork-barrel projects. (President Reagan vetoed a 1987 transportation measure for having just 152 such earmarks.) January 2006 saw the launch of the Medicare drug benefit. If left unchecked, it will speed America's rendezvous with destitution. Top Republicans, of all people, need a refresher course in Reaganism.

How, then, can activists remind citizens and leaders alike of Ronald Reagan and his philosophy? Here are three ways to do so:

First, hold ceremonies to thank influential people who follow Reagan's example. Since 2000, the New York Young Republican Club has celebrated President Reagan's February

9th birthday. It has added an awards program to those occasions. I was proud to emcee its first such evening in 2004. The group presented *National Review* editor emeritus John O'Sullivan the Great Communicator Award, Congress of Racial Equality president Roy Innis the Four Pillars of Freedom Award, and former New York City deputy mayor under Rudy Giuliani, Tony Coles, the Shining City on a Hill Award.

"Our awards program is a great way to honor Reagan's memory and legacy and recognize people who, through their own actions and leadership, help to keep his legacy alive," says Robert Hornak, chairman of the New York YRs.

Last year, the 500-member group gave the Great Communicator Award to MSNBC host Joe Scarborough, the Shining City on a Hill Award to Guardian Angels founder Curtis Sliwa, and a new Peace Through Strength Award to Center for Security Policy president Frank Gaffney.



It is important to use President Reagan's own words on occasions like this. His easy-going sense of humor was one of his greatest strengths. When he turned 75, he told reporters: "Remember. That's only 24 Celsius." Asked how his meeting was with South African archbishop Desmond Tutu, Reagan replied: "So-so." Reagan also could be eloquent and profound at more serious times. He said in 1983: "I've learned in Washington, that that's the only place where sound travels faster than light." And in his first Inaugural address on January 20, 1981, President Reagan said this:

If we look to the answer as to why, for so many years, we achieved so much, prospered as no other people on Earth, it was because here, in this land, we unleashed the energy and individual genius of man to a greater extent than has ever been done before. Freedom and the dignity of the individual have been more available and more assured here than in any other place on Earth. The price for this freedom at times has been high, but we have never been unwilling to pay that price.

Reagan's own words remind people of his views and character. *The Quotable Ronald Reagan* (Regnery Gateway, 1999) by his long-time advisor, Peter Hannaford, provides 180 pages of Reagan's observations on numerous matters, big and small.

Second, sponsor speeches and panel discussions involving alumni of Ronald Reagan's campaigns and administrations. Most of those who worked with Ronald Reagan in Sacramento and Washington, D.C., are still around and fondly recall the man they served. Heritage Foundation scholar Ed Meese, President Reagan's counselor and attorney general, is among the top Reaganites who talk about their experiences with both Governor and President

Reagan. So do one-time campaign manager Ed Rollins and former speechwriters Clark Judge, Peggy Noonan, Peter Robinson, and U.S. Representative Dana Rohrbacher (R-CA). While these folks cannot appear everywhere, the Reagan Alumni Association (and its director Lou Cordia) and the Young America's Foundation (owners of the Reagan Ranch in southern California) can suggest individuals who can discuss how they helped Ronald Reagan achieve his vision. (www.yaf.org)

Finally, activists could arrange for group viewings of films and videos that highlight President Reagan's political accomplishments and rhetorical gifts. "A Time for Choosing," also known as "The Speech," marked Ronald Reagan's arrival on the political scene. In stirring words, this former Democrat endorsed Republican Senator Barry Goldwater's 1964 presidential bid. Reagan's concession speech to the 1976 Republican National Convention, his 1980 convention acceptance speech, his 1981 inaugural address, his 1987 "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!" remarks, and his farewell to the 1992 GOP convention are just a few of the memorable addresses worth watching. Many of them are available in whole or part through the Reagan Presidential Library at www.reaganfoundation.org/store.

Ronald Reagan's lessons and legacy are as instructive and inspiring as ever. Though we lost him on June 5, 2004, America's 40th president still has much to teach his country. Those who believe in him should share his memory and ideas with our fellow freedom fighters through public functions on his next and future birthdays.

New York commentator Deroy Murdock is a syndicated columnist with the Scripps Howard News Service, a senior fellow with the Atlas Economic Research Foundation, and a veteran of the 1980 and 1984 Reagan for President campaigns.