

## President Ronald Reagan

In honor of his 91<sup>st</sup> birthday  
February 6, 2002

### **BIOGRAPHY**

- Ronald W. Reagan was born in Tampico, Illinois on February 6, 1911 to Jack and Nellie Reagan.
- Ronald Reagan attended high school in Dixon, Illinois, and worked as a lifeguard in the summers, rescuing 77 struggling swimmers from the water.
- Reagan studied economics and sociology at Eureka College where he also played football and took the lead in most school plays.
- Reagan took a temporary sports broadcasting job in 1932, and went on to work for WHO, an NBC affiliate, giving Reagan national media exposure.
- In 1937, Reagan began his acting career in Hollywood and went on to act in 53 films. In 1940, Reagan played George Gipp, the “Gipper,” in his most famous film, *Knut Rockne—All American*.
- Reagan enlisted in the Army Reserve as a Private in 1937, though he was soon promoted to 2<sup>nd</sup> lieutenant in the Officers Reserve Corps of the Cavalry. He was called to active duty in the Army Air Force in 1942, and made over 400 training films as a Lieutenant in the 1<sup>st</sup> Motion Picture Unit in Culver City, California. He was honorably discharged in 1943.
- While in Hollywood, Reagan became President of the Screen Actors Guild and found himself in the middle of the attempted communist takeover of the movie industry. He testified before Congress as a friendly witness, where he gave a powerful defense of the strength of democracy. During this time, his political views began to shift from liberal to conservative, and he changed his party registration to Republican in 1962.
- In 1964 he gave a speech for Republican Presidential candidate Barry Goldwater, bursting onto the political scene as a prominent leader in the conservative movement. This speech launched his political career. In 1966, he ran for

governor of California, defeating democrat incumbent Pat Brown by nearly a million votes. In 1970 he won re-election.

- On November 13, 1979, Reagan announced his candidacy for President. After winning the party's nomination, he chose Texas Congressman and former U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, George Bush as his running mate. Their platform call for "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."
- The American people responded to Reagan's hope in America, his call for tax cuts to reverse the economic recession, and his strong moral stance against communism. Ronald Reagan won the election with a landslide, defeating Jimmy Carter with 489 to 49 electoral votes.

### **PRESIDENT REAGAN**

- Ronald Reagan was inaugurated as the 40<sup>th</sup> president of the United States on January 20, 1981, serving in that office until 1989.
- On March 30, Reagan was shot outside the Washington Hilton Hotel. Reagan was rushed to George Washington Hospital, a bullet within an inch of his heart. Reagan showed grace and a quick wit in the face of death, even telling a joke or two within hours of the shooting. When wife Nancy asked what had happened, he simply said, "Honey, I forgot to duck."
- President Reagan believed that government's role was to liberate individuals by creating incentives to work and success. He said:

"We who live in free market societies believe that growth, prosperity and ultimately human fulfillment, are created from the bottom up, not the government down...Trust the people. This is the one irrefutable lesson of the entire postwar period contradicting the notion that rigid government controls are essential to economic development."  
September 29, 1981.<sup>1</sup>
- Reagan entered the White House when the economy was in a recession. His solution to this problem, dubbed Reaganomics, involved, 1) a restrictive monetary policy to stabilize the value of the dollar, 2) a 25% across-the board tax cut designed to spur savings, investment, work and economic efficiency, 3) balanced budget, and 4) reducing government regulation.<sup>2</sup>
- Reagan's Economic Recovery Tax Act passed in 1981, with forty Democrats in the House breaking rank to vote for his plan. This plan cut taxes by 25%,

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<sup>1</sup><http://reagan.webteamone.com/speeches/quotes.html>

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.reaganlegacy.org/record/Cato/SUPPLY-](http://www.reaganlegacy.org/record/Cato/SUPPLY-SIDE%20TAX%20CUTS%20AND%20THE%20TRUTH%20ABOUT%20THE%20REAGAN%20ECONOMIC%20RECORD.htm)

[SIDE%20TAX%20CUTS%20AND%20THE%20TRUTH%20ABOUT%20THE%20REAGAN%20ECONOMIC%20RECORD.htm](http://www.reaganlegacy.org/record/Cato/SUPPLY-SIDE%20TAX%20CUTS%20AND%20THE%20TRUTH%20ABOUT%20THE%20REAGAN%20ECONOMIC%20RECORD.htm)

eventually leading to higher government revenues as Reagan's plan pulled the economy out of recession and spurred economic growth.

- In international relations, Reagan sought “peace through strength” and increased defense spending by 35%.
- President Reagan worked against communism on all fronts. Promising support to any anti-communist uprising in the Western Hemisphere in his “Reagan Doctrine,” President Reagan aided rebels in Central America, Asia, and Africa.
- President Reagan made a strong moral stance against communism. He opposed conventional political wisdom when he called the Soviet Union an “evil empire” and stood in Berlin in 1987, declaring, “Mr. Gorbachev, open this gate! Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!” His uncompromising stance against communism and his increased defense spending finally helped bring communism to its knees when the Wall fell in 1989.
- President Reagan was known for charm and wit even in difficult situations, his identification with the common man, and his undying hope for America and dream of freedom. When he announced in 1994 that he had Alzheimer's disease, he said good-bye with his typical optimism and humility:

“In closing, 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.”

## QUOTES

**Communism:** “The West won't contain communism. It will transcend communism. It will dismiss it as some bizarre chapter in human history whose last pages are even now being written.”

—Commencement Address, University of Notre Dame, May 17, 1981

**Belief in America:** “Some may try to tell us that this is the end of an era. But what they overlook is that in America, every day is a new beginning. For this is the land that has never become, but is always in the act of becoming.”

—Presidential Medal of Freedom Ceremony, the White House, January 13, 1993

**Socialism:** 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. Regardless of their sincerity, their humanitarian motives, those who would sacrifice freedom for security have embarked on this downward path. Plutarch warned, “The real destroyer of the liberties of the people is he who spreads among them bounties, donations and benefits.”

—October 27, 1964

**Taxes:** “We need true tax reform that will at least make a start toward restoring for our children the American Dream that wealth is denied to no one, that each individual has the right to fly as his strength and ability will take him.... But we cannot have such reform while our tax policy is engineered by people who view the tax as a means of achieving changes in our social structure.”

—October 27, 1964.

**Stand for Principle:** “We’ve been trying to follow the advice of Mark Twain, which was, ‘Do what’s right and you’ll please some of the people and astound the rest.’”

—Remarks before the Republican National Committee at a White House Reception, June 6, 1981.

**Age:** “Lately, I’ve been heartened to remember that Moses was 80 when God commissioned him for public service and he lived to be 120. And Abraham was 100 and his wife, Sarah, 90, when they did something truly amazing. He survived to be 175. So, Mr. Prime Minister, we haven’t even hit our full stride yet.”

—Toast to Israeli Prime Minister Begin at the State Dinner, September 9, 1981.

**SOURCES:**

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