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Excerpts of remarks by the Hon. Ronald Reagan,
former Governor of California,
before the Intercollegiate Studies Institute Banquet,
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ISI SPEECH FOR 1/14/77

As Adam said to Eve when they were being expelled from the garden of Eden, "you know, my dear, we live in an age of transition".

I guess this is a recurring theme throughout history. Each age sees itself, in one way or another, as a time of change. And in the United States today it can truly be said that the election of 1976 marks and end of an era in American politics. We currently are in the midst of a reordering of the political realities that have shaped our time. We are now in the beginning of post-Watergate America. The election of 1976 served as a clear dividing line between the all-too-familiar agony of the recent past and the unknown future.

I'd like to talk to you about the problems and possibilities of this time of transition.

I am particularly gratified to have the opportunity to discuss this important subject before this audience. The principles and values that lie at the heart of conservatism are shared by the majority of the American people. Despite what our good friends in the press may say, we who are proud to call ourselves "conservative" are not a minority of a minority party; we are part of the great majority of Americans of both major parties and of most of the independents as well.

A Harris poll released September 7, 1975 showed eighteen per cent identifying themselves as liberal and thirty-one per cent as conservative, with forty-one per cent as middle of the road. A few months later, on January 5, 1976, by a 43-19 plurality those polled by Harris said they would "prefer to see the country move in a more conservative direction than liberal one".

Last October 24th, the Gallup organization released the result of a poll taken right in the midst of the presidential campaign.

2--2--2

Respondents were asked to state where they would place themselves on a scale ranging from "right-of-center" (which was defined as "conservative") to left-of-center (which was defined as "liberal").

- -thirty seven per cent viewed themselves as left of center or liberal.

- -twelve per cent placed themselves in the middle.

- -fifty one per cent said they were right of center, that is, conservative.

What I find interesting about this particular poll is that it offered those polled a range of choices on a left-right continuum. This seems to me to be a more realistic approach than dividing the world into strict left and rights. Most of us, I guess, like to think of ourselves as avoiding both extremes, and the fact that a majority of Americans chose one or the other position on the right end of the spectrum is really impressive.

These polls confirm that most Americans are basically conservative in their outlook. But once we have said this, we conservatives have not solved our problems, we have merely stated them clearly. Yes, conservatism is the majority view. But the fact is that conservatism can and does mean different things to those who call themselves conservatives.

You know, as I do, that most experts and commentators make a distinction between what they call "social" conservatism and "economic" conservatism. The so-called social issues -- law and order, abortion, busing, quota systems -- are usually associated with blue-collar, ethnic and religious groups themselves traditionally associated with the Democratic Party. The economic issues -- inflation, deficit spending and big government -- are usually associated with Republican Party members and independents who concentrate their attention on

3--3--3

economic matters.

Now I am willing to accept this view of two major kinds of conservatism -- or, better still, two different conservative constituencies. But at the same time let me say that the old lines that once clearly divided these two kinds of conservatism are disappearing.

It was only a few years ago that the word "inflation" was something found only in the vocabulary of economists, Republican spokesmen and some editorial writers. But go into any supermarket in America today, stop a man or woman pushing a cart filled with groceries, and mention the word "inflation." You'll get a quick rundown on what inflation really means to working people. It hurts. It hurts everyone. And it is an issue on which all conservatives agree.

Inflation has become what the political pros call a "gut" issue. It's no longer the exclusive worry of hard-line conservative economists or spokesmen for free enterprise. It hits home because it hurts the working man and woman. When economic and social conservatives meet today, they share one major concern and that is what a big-spending, irresponsible Congress has done to the earning power of American workers. A good first step might be to set up a meeting on the problem of inflation to which spokesmen of the economic and social conservative views could attend and exchange ideas.

Let us at least see if it is possible to present a program of action based on political principle that can attract those interested in the so-called "social" issues and those interested in "economic" issues. In short, is it possible to combine the two major segments of contemporary American conservatism into one politically effective whole?

I believe these are the most important questions in American politics today. And my answer to all of them is: Yes, it is possible

4--4--4

to create a political entity that will reflect the views of the great, hitherto, unorganized conservative majority. We went a long way toward doing it in California. We can do it in America. This is not a dream -- a wistful hope. It is and has been a reality. I have seen the conservative future and it works!

What I envision is not simply a melding together of the two branches of American conservatism into a temporary uneasy alliance, but the creation of a new, lasting majority.

This will mean compromise. But not a compromise of basic principle. What will emerge will be something new, something open and vital and dynamic, something the great conservative majority will recognize as its own, because at the heart of this undertaking is principled politics.

I have always been puzzled by the inability of some political and media types to understand exactly what is meant by adherence to political principle. All too often in the press and the television evening news it is treated as a call for "ideological purity". Whatever ideology may mean -- and it seems to mean a variety of things, depending upon who is using it -- it always conjurs up in my mind a picture of a rigid, irrational clinging to abstract theory in the face of reality. We have to recognize that in this country "ideology" is a scare-word. And, for good reason. Marxist-Leninism is, to give but one example, an ideology. All the facts of the real world have to be fitted to the Procrustean bed of Marx and Lenin. If the facts don't happen to fit the ideology, the facts are chopped off and discarded.

I consider this to be the complete opposite to principled conservatism. If there is any political viewpoint in this world which is free of slavish adherence to abstraction it is American conservatism.

When a conservative states that the free market is the best mechanism ever devised by the mind of man to meet material needs, he is merely stating what a careful examination of the real world has told him, is the truth.

When a conservative says that totalitarian Communism is an absolute enemy of human freedom he is not theorizing -- he is reporting the ugly reality captured so unforgettably in the writings of Alexander Solzhenitsyn.

When a conservative says it is bad for the government to spend more than it takes in, he is simply showing the common sense that also tells him to come in out of the rain.

When a conservative says that busing does not work, he is not appealing to some theory of education -- he is merely reporting what he has seen down at the local school.

When a conservative quotes Jefferson that government that is closest to the people is best, it is because he knows that Jefferson risked his life, his fortune and his sacred honor to make certain that what he and his fellow patriots learned from experience was not crushed by an ideology of empire.

Conservatism is the antithesis of the kind of ideological fanaticism that has brought so much horror and destruction to the world. The common sense and the common decency of ordinary men and women, working out their own lives in their own way -- this is the heart of American conservatism today. Conservative wisdom and principles are derived from willingness to learn -- not just from what is going on now, but from what has happened before.

The principles of conservatism are sound because they are based on what men and women have discovered through experience in not just

6--6--6

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 that 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, of sacrifice and sorrow.

One thing that must be made clear in post-Watergate is this: the American new conservative majority we represent is not based on abstract theorizing of the kind that turns off the American people, but on common sense, intelligence, reason, hard work, faith in God, and the guts to say, yes, there are things we do strongly believe in, that we are willing to live for, and yes, if necessary, to die for. That is not "ideological purity". It is simply what built this country and kept it great.

Let us lay to rest, once and for all, the myth of a small group of ideological purists trying to capture a majority. Replace it with the reality of a majority trying to assert its rights against the tyranny of powerful academics, fashionable left-revolutionaries, some economic illiterates who happen to hold elective office and the social engineers who dominate the dialogue and set the format in political and social affairs. If there is any ideological fanaticism in American political life it is to be found among the enemies of freedom on the left and the right -- those who would sacrifice principle to theory, those who worship only the god of political, social and economic abstractions ignoring the realities of everyday life. They are not conservatives.

Our first job is to get this message across to those who share most of our principles. If we allow ourselves to be portrayed as ideological shock troops without correcting this error we are doing ourselves and our cause a disservice. Wherever and whenever we can, we should gently but firmly correct our political and media friends who have been perpetuating the myth of conservatism as a narrow ideology. Whatever the word may have meant in the past, today conservatism means principles evolving from experience and a belief in change when necessary, but not just for the sake of change.

Once we have established this, the next question is: what will be the political vehicle by which the majority can assert its rights?

I have to say I cannot agree with some of my friends -- perhaps including some of you here tonight -- who have answered that question by saying this nation needs a new political party.

I respect that view and I know that those who have reached it have done so after long hours of study. But I believe that political success of the principles we believe in can best be achieved in the Republican Party. I believe the Republican Party, for a variety of reasons, can and should, provide the political mechanism through which the goals of the majority of Americans can be achieved. For one thing, the biggest single grouping of conservatives is to be found in that party. It makes more sense to build on that grouping than to break it up and start over. Rather than a third party, we can have a new first party made up of people who share our principles. I have previously said that if a change in name is thought desirable, then so be it. But tonight, for purpose of discussion, I'm going to refer to it by the title of the New Republican Party.

And let me say so there can be no mistake as to what I mean:

-- The New Republican Party I envision will not, and cannot,

8--8--8

be one limited to the country club - big business image that, for reasons, both fair and unfair, it is burdened with today. The New Republican Party I am speaking about is going to have room for the man and woman in the factories, for the farmer, for the cop on the beat and the millions of Americans who may never have thought of joining our party before -- but whose interests coincide with those represented by principled Republicanism. And let one thing be made clear: if we are to attract more working men and women of this country, we will do so not simply by "making room" for them, but by making certain they have a say in what goes on in the party. The Democratic party turned its back on the majority of social conservatives during the nineteen sixties. The New Republican Party of the late seventies and eighties must welcome them, seek them out, enlist them, not only as rank-and-file members but, as leaders and as candidates.

The New Republican Party I envision is still going to be the party of Lincoln and that means we are going to have to come to grips with what I consider to be a major failing of the party: its failure to attract the majority of black voters. I know there are historical and economic reasons for the top-heavy majority black Americans give to Democratic candidates. But the time has come for Republicans to say to black voters: look, we offer principles that black Americans can, and do, support. We believe in jobs, real jobs; we believe in education that is really education; we believe in treating all Americans as individuals and not as stereotypes -- and we believe that the long-range interest of black America lies in looking at what each major party has to offer. And then deciding on the merits. The Democratic Party takes the black note for granted. Well, it's time

9--9--9

black America and the New Republican Party move toward each other and create a situation in which no black vote can be taken for granted.

The New Republican Party I envision is one that will energetically seek out the best candidates for every elective office, candidates who not only agree with, but understand, and are willing to fight for a sound, honest economy, for the interests of American families and neighborhoods and communities and a strong national defense. And these candidates must be able to communicate those principles to the American people in language they understand. Not the economic jargon and cliches that too often sound like long passages from poorly written textbooks. Inflation isn't a text book problem. Unemployment isn't a text book problem. They should be discussed in human terms.

Our candidates must be willing to communicate with every level of society, every group and sub-group because the principles we espouse are universal and cut across traditional lines. In every Congressional district there should be a search made for young men and women who share these principles and they should be brought into positions of leadership in the local Republican Party groups. We can find attractive, articulate candidates if we look, and when we find them, we will begin to change the sorry state of affairs that has led to a Democratic-controlled Congress for more than forty years. I need not remind you that you can have the soundest principles in the world, but if you don't have candidates who can communicate those principles, candidates who are articulate as well as principled, you are going to lose election after election. I refuse to believe that the good Lord divided this world into Republicans

who defend basic values, and Democrats who win elections. We have to find the tough, bright young men and women who are sick and tired of the cliches and the pomposity and the mind-numbing economic idiocy of the liberals in Washington.

It is at this point, however, that we come across a question that is really the essential one: what will be the basis of this New Republican Party? To what set of values and principles can our candidates appeal? Where can Americans who want to know where we stand look for guidance?

Fortunately, we have an answer to that question. That answer was provided last summer by the men and women of the Republican Party -- not just the leadership, but the ones who have built the party on local levels all across the country.

The answer was provided in the 1976 Platform of the Republican Party.

This was not a document handed down from on high. It was hammered out in free and open debate among all those who care about our party and the principles it stands for.

The Republican Platform is unique in that unlike any other party platform I have ever seen, it answers not only programmatic questions for the immediate future of the party, but also provides a clear outline of the underlying principles upon which those programs are based.

I am convinced that the New Republican Party can and should use the Republican Platform of 1976 as the major source from which a Declaration of principles can be created and offered to the American people.

Tonight I want to offer to you my own version of what such a

11--11--11

declaration might look like. I make no claim to originality. This declaration I propose is relatively short, taken, for the most part, word for word from the Republican Platform. It concerns itself with basic principles, not with specific solutions.

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. Toward that end, we, therefore, commit ourselves to the following propositions and offer them to each American believing that the New Republican Party, based on such principles, will serve the interest of all the American people.

We believe that liberty can be measured by how much freedom Americans have to make their own decisions -- even their own mistakes. Government must step in when one's liberties impinge on one's neighbor's. Government must protect constitutional rights, deal with other governments, protect citizens from aggressors, assure equal opportunity, and be compassionate in caring for those citizens who are unable to care for themselves.

Our federal system of local-state-national government is designed to sort out on what level these actions should be taken. Those concerns of a national character -- such as air and water pollution that do not respect state boundaries, or the national transportation system, or efforts to safeguard your civil liberties -- must, of course, be handled on the national level.

As a general rule, however, we believe that government action

12--12--12

should be taken first by the government that resides as close to you as possible.

We also believe that Americans, often acting through voluntary organizations, should have the opportunity to solve many of the social problems of their communities. This spirit of freely helping others is uniquely American and should be encouraged in every way by government.

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.

Thus it is imperative that our government's programs, actions, officials and social welfare institutions never be allowed to jeopardize the family. We fear the government may be powerful enough to destroy our families; we know that it is not powerful enough to replace them. The New Republican Party is committed to working always in the interest of the American family.

Every dollar spent by government is a dollar earned by individuals. Government must always ask: Are your dollars being wisely spent? Can we afford it? Is it not better for the country to leave your dollars in your pocket?

Elected officials, their appointees, and government workers are expected to perform their public acts with honesty, openness, diligence, and special integrity.

Government must work for the goal of justice and the elimination of unfair practices, but no government has yet designed a

13--13--13

more productive economic system or one which benefits as many people than the American market system.

The beauty of our land is our legacy to our children. It must be protected by us so that they can pass it on intact to their children.

The United States must always stand for peace and liberty in the world and the rights of the individual. We must form sturdy partnerships with our allies for the preservation of freedom. We must be ever willing to negotiate differences, but equally mindful that there are American ideals that cannot be compromised. Given that there are other nations with potentially hostile design, we recognize that we can reach our goals only while maintaining a superior national defense, second to none.

With these basic principles as foundation, the New Republican Party pledges to work for freedom, justice and prosperity for the individual, the family and the nation.

There it is. I want to emphasize that what I have just read to you is not meant to be engraved in stone. It is rather an attempt to present what might be called first draft of a New Republican Party's Declaration of Principles.

My friends, the time has come to start acting to bring about the great conservative majority party we know is waiting to be created.

And just to set the record straight, let me say this about our friends who are now Republicans but who do not identify themselves as conservatives:

I want the record to show that I do not view the new revitalized Republican Party as one based on a principle of exclusion.

14--14--14

After all, you do not get to be a majority party by searching for groups you won't associate or work with. If we truly believe in our principles, we should sit down and talk. Talk with anyone, anywhere, at any time if it means talking about the principles of the Republican Party. Conservatism is not a narrow ideology nor is it the exclusive property of conservative activists.

The success of liberalism in the United States is due, in no small part, to the success of its adherents in the media and the universities in making liberalism attractive to young Americans and in serving as sources of ideas to liberal politicians. Conservatives in political life should make it a habit to keep in touch with, and hire as aides, conservative thinkers and academicians. We have great ideas. We have too often failed to put them in practice. I guess what I'm trying to say is that we've succeeded better than we know. Little more than a decade ago more than two-thirds of Americans believed the Federal government could solve all our problems with it's multitude of bureaus, agencies and programs, and do so without restricting our freedom or bankrupting the Nation.

We warned of things to come; of the danger inherent in unwarranted government involvement in things not it's proper province. What we warned against has come to pass. And today more than two-thirds of our citizens are telling us, and each other, that social engineering by the Federal government has failed. The Great Society is great only in power, in size and in cost. And so are the problems it set out to solve. Freedom has been diminished and we stand on the brink of economic ruin.

Our task now is not to sell a philosophy, but to make the

15--15--15

majority of Americans, who already share that philosophy, see that modern conservatism offers them a political home. We are not a cult, we are members of a majority. Let's act and talk like it. We must not allow a healthy distrust of big government to be portrayed as total anti-government absolutism. Condemning the excesses of liberals in power and the irresponsibility of the present Democratic Congress is not a challenge to the idea and existence of government itself.

When we are maligned as having little thought or compassion for people, let us denounce the slander for what it is. Concern for the people is at the very heart of conservatism. Concern for the dignity of all men; that those in need shall be helped to become independent -- not life time recipients of a dole; concern that those who labor and produce will not be robbed of the fruit of their toil or their liberty. Concern that we shall not forfeit the dream that gave birth to this Nation -- the dream that we can be as a shining city upon a hill -- an "alabaster city undimmed by human tears."

Believing in that dream, I became a Republican and because of that dream I am a conservative.