The Reagan Legacy in the Age of Obama

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I chose as my topic tonight some reflections on the legacy of Ronald Reagan in the age of Obama because they are often compared by observers who are my age and can remember Reagan firsthand. It's useful because Reagan—who I grew up with in California, as Governor, and later as President—has become a full-fledged historical figure. So much so that even some liberals, who used to dislike him, now like him—or like parts of him. Hence, the comparisons with our current president: a person of charm and ability, as we've seen.

When I started writing about Reagan more than ten years ago, there weren't very many books about Reagan; now there are lots of books about him. And there are going to be lots of books about President Obama, of course. One of the problems is trying to capture and convey the essence of these people as time moves so fast. I have been reflecting lately that the coming down of the Berlin Wall turned twenty-one this year. It's old enough to drink! Of course, for all of you who were born since the Berlin Wall came down, the Berlin Wall might as well be Hadrian's Wall; this is something in the misty receding past. It's hard to remember that this was one of the central facts of life in Europe for two generations.

One of the reasons that Obama and Reagan are interesting to compare is that a lot of the people who are enthusiastic about Obama see him as the liberal version of Ronald Reagan, if not, perhaps, the second coming of Franklin Roosevelt. He's got an attractive and compelling personality as well as terrific speaking skills, and those skills allowed him to blunt the rougher edges of his liberal ideology in the election of 2008 and appeal to the broad spectrum of non-ideological voters who decide most of the elections in America. The other reason Reagan is an example for Obama is that Reagan proved that it is possible to be an ideological president and to govern successfully as an ideological president. Obama himself acknowledged that during the campaign. He said this partially to annoy Hillary Clinton and her husband; he said, "Ronald Reagan changed the trajectory of America, he put us on a fundamentally different path because the country was ready for it." I'll say this, as one of my opening themes: for all Obama's great talents, I think he has not grasped some of the essential points of how Reagan succeeded at advancing his ideological agenda. I'll lay out three reasons for that.

THE POLITICAL CONTEXT

The context is obvious. We are a week away from a midterm election in which the Democrats are expected to get a historic pounding. And most of Obama's fans are wondering, "What went wrong?" Now, a little point of history for those of you who probably don't know it, the losses the Democrats are expected to suffer next week are in stark contrast to the election of 1982, the first midterm for President Reagan. Reagan was in the midst of what was then the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression, with the unemployment rate on Election Day over ten percent (higher than it is today by half a point) and Reagan's own approval ratings were below forty percent (lower than Obama's are today). Yet, the Republicans lost only twenty-six seats in the House in that election. They stayed even in the Senate—no losses at all. Those were way below what the standard models in political science would have predicted that they should lose in those kinds of conditions. Political observers then were left scratching their heads, saying, "Why didn't the Democrats do better in the election of 1982?" Kevin Phillips, one of the really big figures in political punditry, said, "Never before in the post-1954 competitions has the party out of power scored such piddling gains in the face of massive and increasing unemployment."[1] Two other scholars, Robert Rowland and Rodger Payne, wrote in the *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, "When the historical trend [of off-year election losses] is considered, the Republican loss of twenty-six seats not only seems relatively small, but might be interpreted as a kind of political victory."[2]

By contrast, if you go with Charlie Cook, who is one of the straighter shooters in this game of predicting where the election is going to go, he's saying right now on his website that it looks like the Democrats are going to lose in the neighborhood of sixty seats in the House. These losses that are projected are much larger than the political science models suggest should be the case under current circumstances. So this contrast between '82 and what's likely to happen next week needs some explaining. I think there are lessons to be learned regardless of one's ideology, by contrasting the political profiles and practices of Reagan and Obama in their first two years in office.

COMPARING REAGAN AND OBAMA

So I think there are three aspects to think about for these two presidents, but I think some of these lessons apply to heads of state in almost any democratic political system.

Central Ideas

First, one question that should always be asked is, "What's their central idea?" Abraham Lincoln wrote that all nations have a central idea from which all its minor thoughts radiate.[3] I think the same can be said about leading political figures, presidents, prime ministers, and so forth. Reagan's central idea was really pretty simple. His central idea can be summarized as the view that unlimited government is hostile to liberty, both in its vicious forms like totalitarianism, but also in its supposedly benign forms like bureaucracy. Reagan explained it in almost exactly those terms at numerous times during his career. It's

only slightly facetious to say that Reagan saw the KGB and the DMV on the same sort of continuum. Obviously a little exaggerated, but not an entirely dissimilar phenomenon.

Chief Aims Arising from Central Ideas

The second question to ask is, "What do they regard as their chief aim arising from their central idea?" Reagan sought an ideological realignment of the nation, if not in fact a partisan realignment as FDR did with the New Deal. He said in his inaugural address that his aim was "to curb the size and influence of the federal establishment." He went on to say, "It is time to check and reverse the growth of government, which shows signs of having grown beyond the consent of the governed." Note here that Reagan rested his argument not on the ground of efficiency or effectiveness, but on the constitutional ground of consent as it comes to light in the Declaration of Independence. Among other interesting things I think Reagan wrote is one thought he put in a private letter to a friend in 1979 where he said, "The permanent structure of government with its power to pass regulations has eroded, if not in effect repealed, portions of our Constitution."[4]

So, Reagan is pretty simple to make out: he wants smaller government, lower taxes, less spending, less regulation. Obama seeks to reverse what you might call the "Reagan turn" in American politics. He was fairly open about that in his books, but he was not as open or explicit about that, I suggest, in his campaign for president, and therein lies some of his difficulty. It's hard to work out exactly what Obama's central idea or guiding principle is, beyond faith in himself, which is a necessary but not sufficient condition for making serious political change. Take the slogan, "Hope and change"—or the one that he liked even better, "We are the ones we've been waiting for." You know, when I spend time out in California, you expect someone who says "we are the ones we have been waiting for" to add "dude!" to the end of that sentence. I think those slogans (especially "hope and change") shrewdly exploited voter fatigue with George W. Bush and Republicans. But that's not really a political program, is it? It's not really a policy program.

Again, the contrast with Reagan and the 1980 campaign is very startling. Reagan put out a very specific policy agenda with what he would do if elected: chiefly tax cuts, sound monetary policy, spending restraint (as I've already mentioned), and deregulation on the domestic side, and a much tougher foreign policy against the Soviets on the foreign side. Obama's specific policy program was rather more opaque. He did talk about healthcare reform, but on the other hand disputed Hillary Clinton about the need for an individual mandate in such a program.

Now, to be fair to Obama, he—like everyone else—was caught completely by surprise by the banking crisis that emerged almost overnight, or over one weekend, in September, 2008. And that threw everyone's calculations into the ditch, including his own. So, he's had to improvise an awful lot—more than any incoming president in a very long time. The economic problems that Reagan faced in 1980 were

well known, were a long time in the making, and were well understood by 1980—even if the solutions were not as obvious. We'll talk more about that in due course. The point is, there was a lot of debate about Reagan's ideas before he was president, whereas some of Obama's ideas (such as the exact features of healthcare reform and the exact nature of the stimulus bill that emerged very quickly in January and February of 2009) were not subject to much prior debate before the election, or afterwards.

Maneuvering Within Their Political Circumstances

The third question, and the most important one, is, "How have these two presidents in their first two years maneuvered within the political circumstances in which they have found themselves?" Here is where I think the really interesting contrast comes to light, not only involving their different styles and characters, but also different institutional characters of the two major political parties in this country. I suggest—and actually there was a column in the *Washington Post* today by Marc Thiessen making the same point—that there was an early sign that Obama was going to head for some trouble or was engaging in a very high risk strategy. This is one alternative we'll talk about—high risks, of course, often lead to high rewards, right?

The first sign he was heading for difficulty, I think, occurred within his first week in office. When he curtly rebuffed the House Republican whip, Eric Cantor, when Cantor suggested in a meeting that if you're going to do a stimulus package, why not have some tax cuts in it? Most especially cuts in the payroll tax for Social Security and Medicare? Obama's response was essentially, "well, you know elections have consequences." This is certainly true. Obama went on to say, "I won, so I trump you on that point." House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said the same thing the next day; she said, "We won the election; we wrote the bill." Well, you're entitled to say that because you did win an election rather convincingly, but "we won" is not an argument, it's a statement of power. But of course, power can be evanescent in a system that has elections every two years.

The contrast with Reagan in 1981 is instructive. Reagan won an enormous and unexpected landslide, carrying forty-four states and carrying—I think—ten new Republicans into the Senate. Republicans taking control of the Senate for the first time in twenty-six years—that was unexpected! Upon entering office, Reagan's team produced a fifty-page analysis that detailed their plans almost day-by-day of what they were going to do their first six months in office. It was called the Initial Actions Project. The most interesting thing is that it has attracted almost no interest from historians—except me and Lou Cannon, the journalist who wrote most faithfully about Reagan and who pointed out this document to me in the course of my research. I wrote in the *Wall Street Journal* about a month into Obama's presidency that it would be useful if he and David Axelrod looked at that document.

One of the themes that emerges from the Initial Actions Project report is that Reagan and his team did not assume that their landslide election conferred on them a mandate to do anything they wanted. To

the contrary, the two main authors, Richard Wirthlin, Reagan's pollster, and David Gergen, who you may still see sometimes on PBS and other shows, wrote, "The election was not a bestowal of political power, but a stewardship opportunity for us to reconsider and restructure the political agenda for the next two decades. The public has sanctioned the search for a new public philosophy to govern America."[5] In other words, to establish a new governing philosophy—Reagan really saw himself as breaking with the previous forty years of what you might call the New Deal liberal consensus that had held up even under other Republican presidents like Eisenhower and Nixon—you would need sustained public argument. You couldn't just hide behind "we won."

To the contrary, they said we're going to have to engage in arguments, which Reagan carried on even behind closed doors with Democratic House speaker Tip O'Neill. When they got together throughout the six years that he remained speaker before his retirement after the 1986 election, they didn't just sit down the way you normally do during political meetings in Washington and start horse-trading: "I'll give you this if you give me that." Instead, they both liked to have big sweeping arguments about the nature of the welfare state and the fairness of the tax systems. You would have thought from the transcripts of these meetings that these were televised debates in front of the American people.

One other comment that the Initial Actions Project made was about outgoing President Jimmy Carter. They said President Carter "failed to realize that leadership means more than 'laying it all out;' it also means keeping at it." I think, a little bit like President Carter, that President Obama sometimes seems peeved that Washington won't roll over for his good ideas and good agenda. There's one good line from the Initial Actions Project: the public "are yet to be convinced that Mr. Reagan's policies will work, the President's focus should be on the outlining of broad strategic policy outcomes and not on narrow programs…The President's public presentation of policy [should] be simple, straightforward and understandable."[6] I remember President Obama getting bogged down talking about the benefits of weatherization in the stimulus bill, which even Jon Stewart thought was "lame." (That was Jon Stewart's term, I think.)

Throughout the long tax-cut battle of 1981, Reagan's economic plan took until the end of July to get passed through Congress. It was a long drawn-out battle throughout the spring and early summer. Reagan understood that it was no sure thing that it would pass and that he had to constantly argue for it in front of the American public, making repeated speeches on television, in front of Congress, on the radio, through press conferences before audiences, and so forth. Now, one of the things that was observed in the Initial Actions Plan was that we probably only have a six- to eight-month window before business as usual returns to Washington. Sadly, that is a reflection on how the world does work in Washington these days. They said that after about six or eight months, "organized interest groups will regain their strength and aggressiveness."

But I want to suggest that President Obama started out in a certain way by empowering organized interest groups, or at least the ones close to House Democrats, to unleash their pent-up aggressiveness in the drafting of the stimulus bill. One of the things you notice about Reagan and Lyndon Johnson—this is true of the Great Society legislation in the '60s—is that although they talk in broad strokes to the public in their arguments about the program, they are actively involved in crafting the details of the bills that Congress is considering. Reagan always asked Congress for an up or down vote on his plan. He took ownership of the plan. Obama pretty much told Congress that they could write the stimulus package any way they wanted and he'd pretty much sign it.

I think here you find an instructive lesson in the character of the two parties. The Democratic Party really has been—at least since Richard Nixon, maybe before—more of a legislative party. They really understand how to make government work and how to run the government from Capitol Hill, through the appropriations process, through the oversight process. This is a reason why both President Carter and President Clinton had great difficulty with their own parties. President Carter had miserable relations with a very large Democratic majority in Congress during his unhappy one term. And this is why the Republican Party is rather more executive-minded, in part because that was the only branch they seemed to be able to successfully win control of after Franklin Roosevelt came along. It is also why the Republicans tend to be more disciplined when you have a Republican president and a Republican Congress like you did under George W. Bush who had very narrow majorities, but majorities that seemed to be able to pass the president's program.

There's one other key to Reagan's success in his first year in getting his program passed. The Democrats still had a decent majority in the House of Representatives, which meant that Reagan could not pass his program unless he persuaded a large number of Democrats to come along and support his program. That was another element that required his persuasion, not only of the public, but also of enough of the other party. There was ferocious opposition to Reagan's program from the Democratic leadership. Reagan won the battle for public opinion such that his tax cut plan passed eighty-nine to ten in the Senate and passed with about fifty Democratic votes in the House, along with the votes from all the Republicans. In some sense, Obama's large Democratic majorities had turned out to be something of a curse to him because it relieved him of the necessity of having to persuade some Republicans to go along. If Obama had wanted to, he could have found some room in the stimulus for Republican ideas and gotten thirty or forty Republican votes in the House, which would have made the stimulus a bipartisan program, just as Reagan was able to claim throughout 1982 that his economic plan, which at the time was not perceived to be working, was nonetheless passed on a bipartisan basis.

Now it could be—and here I'll speculate—that Obama was perfectly fine with passing his stimulus plan and later his healthcare bill on a partisan, party-line vote. This could be based on the theory

that if it works, the Democratic Party and Obama will get the credit and the Republican Party will be further marginalized and (like Franklin Roosevelt in 1934) the Democrats will roll up even larger liberal majorities to continue with the agenda later in the first term or in the second term. That's a reasonable risk to have taken, but you can see it has left Obama vulnerable to exactly the circumstances he sees today.

Here's another quotation from Reagan's Initial Actions Plan that Obama might want to reflect on. "Should the economy remain in its current disarray, the administration could quickly lose control of the current economic policy agenda . . . . We would essentially be reduced to reacting to events rather than shaping the economic agenda."[7] I think that's pretty much what happened to President Obama. There was the backlash against the stimulus bill, the backlash against the healthcare bill, and then something for which Reagan had no parallel, the rise of the populist Tea Party movement. Now what did Reagan do in 1982, facing ten percent unemployment and an economy that was not moving at all and the rising of opposition from the Democrats who were attacking him quite effectively? He stuck to a single theme throughout the whole campaign, and it was three words: "stay the course." That was his theme over and over again. He argued that the plan needed time to work to turn the economy around.

The Obama people talked about trying to emulate Reagan's 1982 strategy a bit, but never seemed to grab a hold of it and never seemed to try. Instead, they've been treated to what appears to be a search for anything that might work, such as "secret foreign money" or "John Boehner will be an orange-faced nightmare as Speaker of the House" and so forth. And some of these may work in the ordinary sense of the give and take of political campaigns. But you see they lack that theme of strength, and I suspect the real problem for Obama is that he and his people will have surveys showing that the stimulus and the healthcare bill will be unpopular, so that asking especially independent and swing voters to stay the course is actually to risk an even greater electoral defeat next week than trying something else. By contrast, in 1982 a number of political scientists picking over the poll data and the election results and the exit polls and so forth concluded, as one political scientist did, that, "Democratic gains were limited because, despite a severe recession, many voters had not given up hope that Reaganomics would eventually work."[8]

LOOKING AHEAD

Now looking ahead a bit, I think that the hazard for Republicans next week is that if they enjoy a historic victory, they will interpret their win as a mandate. They did that once before in 1994. I would suggest to Republicans that they ought to heed the observation made in *The New Republic* after the 1982 election, which editorialized, "The 1982 election conferred no great mandate on liberals to run the country, but it did seem to withdraw the 1980 mandate of extreme conservativism."[9] Likewise, I think next week's election, if it rolls out the way Charlie Cook and the others say it will, should probably be interpreted as a rebuke especially from independent-minded voters who thought they were going to get

another moderate Bill Clinton and who are now issuing what P.J. O'Rourke is calling a "restraining order" against the aggressive liberalism of Obama and the congressional Democrats. But that will leave things in an ambiguous state, I suggest. And we should wait for the ink to dry on the headlines before making too many conclusions.

REAGAN'S MOST SIGNIFICANT ACHIEVEMENT

Finally, I want to reflect on what I consider the most significant achievement of the Reagan presidency, one that is hardly ever mentioned especially by Reagan's admirers, and one that may not be apparent to a younger generation that doesn't remember or know the circumstances that Reagan found himself in. Suffice it to say that Reagan came into office in 1980 in a time of extreme self-doubt for the American people. I think that the American mood had never been as pessimistic as it was then. And I think that it was more pessimistic then even than it is today. You had the right-track/wrong-track poll numbers that were at an all-time low, with almost eighty percent of Americans saying that the country was going in the wrong direction. For the first time a majority said that they expected their children would have lives inferior to their own. That was very unusual. We had been through essentially twenty years of mostly bad news, starting with the assassination of President Kennedy, the Vietnam War, and the Watergate scandal. And you had several presidents in a row that were reckoned as failures, starting with Johnson, then Nixon, Ford, and Carter.

So by the time you got to 1980, the doubt and pessimism about our country even extended to our form of government itself. The presidency it said was an office inadequate for modern times and that the Constitution itself was probably obsolete. So this was raising questions about whether self-government within the American system was possible at all. This represented a very startling turnaround in such a short period of time. At the high tide of Watergate, at Richard Nixon's resignation in 1974, the popular theme was that the greatest danger to America was the "imperial presidency." Lyndon Johnson and Nixon had done these abuses because the president was too powerful, and now within just the short space of a few years, very serious people were saying that the presidency was not powerful enough.

So let me give you a flavor of what some leading thinkers were saying at the time. Barbara Tuchman, the popular historian wrote, "The job of president is too difficult for any single person because of the complexity of the problems and the size of government. Maybe some form of plural executive is needed, such as they have in Switzerland."[10]

U.S. News and World Report magazine (still a magazine then even though it's all online now) editorialized, "Perhaps the burdens have become so great that, over time, no president will be judged adequate in the eyes of most voters."[11]

Columnist Joseph Kraft, one of the big-name columnists in the last half of the twentieth century, wrote in the *Washington Post*, "As the country goes to the polls in the 47th national election, the

presidency as an institution is in trouble. It has become, as Vice President Mondale said in a recent interview, the 'fire hydrant of the nation.'"[12] That's fun.

Newsweek: "The presidency has in some measure defeated the last five men who have held it—and has persuaded some of the people who served them that it is in danger of becoming a game nobody can win . . . the job as now constituted is or is becoming impossible, no matter who holds it."[13]

Robert Wright and Fred Greenstein, two leading political scientists: "Recent history offers little cause for optimism about Ronald Reagan's chances of governing the American people to their satisfaction."[14]

Godfrey Hodgson, a really interesting and stylistic British journalist and historian, wrote that "Reagan has aroused expectations that he cannot fulfill. Disappointment will turn into disillusionment, and excessive expectations will curdle into unreasonable resentment. That has happened, in one way or another, to each of the last half dozen presidents. Why should Ronald Reagan be an exception?"[15]

Theodore Lowi and other prominent political scientists said that the presidency is an impossible job. James MacGregor Burns: "The greatest problem of America in modern times is despair and disillusion of thoughtful people with the apparent incapacity to solve our problems under an antiquated governmental system, booby-trapped with vetoes, and a purposely designed self-limiting division of power."[16]

It goes on and on. Everett Carll Ladd of *Fortune* said that the presidency was not powerful enough and we had to have fundamental restructuring of public institutions. This was not just idle parlor talk among the intellectuals and the journalists. Congress actually considered a resolution to form a commission on more effective government. It would have been charged with making "a comprehensive review of our system of government"—essentially another Philadelphia Convention.

President Carter's White House council, Lloyd Cutler, one of those grand old wise men of Washington who pops up all the time, wrote a widely-noted article in *Foreign Affairs* in the Fall of 1980 that we needed extensive constitutional reforms, including the power of the president to dissolve Congress the way prime ministers can dissolve parliament on occasions of a hung parliament. Some ideas were, "why don't we have a parliamentary system where members of Congress serve in the Cabinet?"—which right now is unconstitutional. President Carter in his farewell address in 1981 said, "Today we are asking our political system to do things of which the Founding Fathers never dreamed." The translation as I see it is, "Don't blame me—I was hamstrung by this impotent office of the presidency." And for all the people who thought the presidency was an inadequate institution, Ronald Reagan (former movie actor and person thought to be capable of little more than reading from four-by-six cards) was the least likely person to reverse the state of things for the simple reason that (never mind his own capacities) all these

ideas call for making the government more powerful, for making the executive a more powerful institution.

Reagan's whole idea, as I said earlier, was to make the government less powerful. So, Reagan was running against the power of elite opinion. Well, I think that the highest measure of Reagan's achievement was that after eight years of his presidency—notwithstanding the Iran-Contra complete disaster in this second term—all this talk of the presidency as an inadequate institution vanished into the mists. The *National Journal* polled presidential scholars in 1986 and found that a large majority thought that Reagan has succeeded in "reviving trust and confidence in an institution that in the post-Vietnam era had been perceived as being unworkable."[17] This is Reagan's greatest and unappreciated achievement.

RESTRAINING FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

Reagan was succeeded for one term by the vice president, the first George Bush. Since then, we've had two back-to-back, two-term presidents: Bill Clinton and George W. Bush. Both were able to govern reasonably effectively, if not always with consistent popularity. Now, I dwell on this point at the length that I have because I'm hearing echoes again of these themes. Mostly from frustrated liberals who are starting once again to say that the nation is ungovernable and, more specifically, that the Senate is an insuperable obstacle to progress. And finally, you even see some commentary about the Tea Party's fervency for the Constitution, or constitutionalism, being counterproductive, since it is from the Constitution that all the restraints on progressive government emanate. I just want to suggest that it is not a good thing for American liberalism when it begins to express doubts about the basic constitutional structure of our institutions and political life.

Now, on the other side of the ledger for Reagan fans, I pose this challenge. I quoted from Reagan's first inaugural address saying his object was to shrink the size and reach of the federal government. After Reagan left office eight years later, the federal government was larger in real terms (that is, once adjusted for inflation and population growth) than when he took office. And while he had a number of significant reforms that lived up to his aspirations, in the end he failed in his larger objective of restraining the federal government in the long run. Indeed, in the conclusion of my book, *The Age of Reagan: The Conservative Counterrevolution: 1980-1989*—out in paperback next Tuesday!—I summarize the problem thusly: "Reagan was more successful in rolling back the Soviet empire than he was in rolling back the domestic government empire, chiefly because this is a harder problem."[18]

Reagan understood, especially in his second term, that conventional efforts to restrain government through budget fights and all the bureaucratic battles over this regulation and that regulation were insufficient to constrain government as he thought it should be constrained. So, late in his second term, he started proposing what he called his "Economic Bill of Rights." There's a bit of a linguistic

marshalling being practiced because this is the same phrase Franklin Roosevelt used in 1944 proposing entitlements, including a right to healthcare, housing, a job, and so forth.

Reagan's Economic Bill of Rights was five constitutional amendments he thought we needed. And see if this sounds like the Tea Party platform—that is, if they actually had one you could point to. The first two are old Reagan standbys: a balanced budget amendment and a line item veto (as almost all governors have) so you can cross out individual spending items from these phone-book-sized budget bills that Congress routinely sends to the president. Reagan had asked for those two measures in every State of the Union speech and in lots of other speeches.

But he added three more. One was a constitutional spending limit of some proportion; he didn't specify the number, but it probably would have been around twenty or twenty-one percent of GDP, which is the long-term, historic, peacetime average for government spending until President Obama came along and took us up to about twenty-five or twenty-six percent of GDP where we are today (and are likely to stay). The fourth one was a two-thirds vote requirement for Congress to pass a tax increase. And the final one is the most curious, in many ways. It was a constitutional prohibition on wage and price controls. Now, I say that was a curious one because by the late 1980s inflation had come way down and we tried wage and price controls in the 1970s and everybody—liberal, conservative, in-between, Rastafarian, Zoroastrian, whoever—all agree that wage and price controls were a dismal failure, and no one was talking about bringing them back.

Today, wage and price controls would seem pretty bizarre because right now we seem to be facing the threat of deflation (falling prices) and falling wages. On the other hand, we are today controlling the wages of bankers and all company executives—or at least we are trying to control their wages, but not doing so very well. And maybe we should be doing so if we continue to give them the kind of government assistance that we have been giving them, but the fact that we do this without even raising questions about its propriety or the precedent it sets is interesting.

I would suggest to you further that healthcare reform in the fullness of time will have to involve government controlling the prices of the healthcare sector. Probably all the prices of the healthcare sector instead of half the prices we currently control today through Medicare and Medicaid. It is interesting that Reagan thought circumstances may change in the future and if there isn't something written down in black and white we may go back to wage and price controls.

Now those amendments never had any chance of passing anytime in Reagan's presidency. Constitutional amendments by design are hard to pass. There are good arguments, by the way, from a conservative point of view, against each one of those amendments. Any balanced budget amendment would have to have an exception for wartime or national emergency and certainly conditions since September 11, 2001 or since the banking crisis two years ago would qualify as a national emergency. And

even failing that, if a balanced budget amendment had an exception for war, as Senator Pat Moynihan used to say, every year Congress would have this convenient little arrangement with Iceland. And that's probably right, and there are similar problems with the line item veto and so forth.

On the other hand, when you make arguments of a constitutional nature, as Franklin Roosevelt did in the middle of the 1930s when he was frustrated with the Supreme Court, it often changes public sentiment. That form of public argument is actually a good thing to have happen. This is why I've said to the Tea Party people whenever they call me (and they have a couple of times), "Why don't you just adopt Reagan's Economic Bill of Rights as your platform?" Yet they don't know what it is. Populist movements are fun and interesting, but it's like herding cats—you can't really get them to settle on a program. So what I conclude in my book is that Reagan successfully curbed the excesses of liberalism in the 1980s, but he didn't curb liberalism itself and that's why the way was open for Barack Obama to reinvigorate liberalism in a way we haven't seen since Lyndon Johnson almost fifty years ago.

The problem from a Reaganite point of view is that it is the inexorable logic of modern American government to expand by degrees. That is the intended legacy of the Progressive Era and the New Deal movements, which I suggest are broadly constitutional in their purpose. I think that both Reagan and Obama, since they're both ambitious men, need to take to heart the council of Machiavelli, the one whose famous lines were, "There is nothing more difficult to take in hand, more perilous to conduct, or more uncertain in its success, than to take the lead in the introduction of a new order of things."[19]

NOTES

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3. Abraham Lincoln, "December 10, 1865—Fragment of a Speech at a Republican Banquet in Chicago" in John J. Nicolay and John Hay, eds., *Abraham Lincoln: Complete Works* (New York: The Century Co., 1907), p. 225.
4. Ronald Reagan, "Letter to Ben T. Shaw, dated May 10, 1979" in *Reagan: A Life in Letters* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 2003), p. 273.
5. *President Ronald Reagan's Initial Actions Project.* (New York: Threshold Editions, 2009), p. 21.
6. Ibid*.,* pp. 12-13.
7. Ibid., p. 48.
8. Alan I. Abramowitz, "National Issues, Strategic Politicians and Voting Behavior in the 1980 and 1982 Elections," *American Journal of Political Science*, 28 (1984): 710.
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10. Barbara Tuchman, "These Are Not Times That Evoke Great Leadership," *US News & World Report* (June 30, 1980): 51.
11. Donald C. Bacon, "One More Disposable President." *US News & World Report* (1980): 64.

12. Joseph Kraft, as cited by Hayward, *The Age of Reagan*, p. 14.
13. Peter Goldman, "The Presidency; Can Anyone Do the Job?" *Newsweek* (January 26, 1981): 35.
14. Fred Greenstein and Robert Wright, "Reagan . . . Another Ike?" *Public Opinion* (December 1980/January 1981): 51.
15. Godfrey Hodgson, *All Things to All Men* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1980), p 253.
16. James McGregor Burns as cited by TRB from Washington, "Tremors at Versailles," *New Republic,* 186 (June 9, 1982), p. 39.
17. *The National Journal,* as cited by Hayward, *The Age of Reagan*, p. 16.
18. Hayward, *The Age of Reagan*, p. 639.
19. Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. W.K. Marriott (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1952), p. 9.