

**Governor Haley Barbour**  
**Remarks to Celebrate President Ronald Reagan's 101<sup>st</sup> Birthday**  
**Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation & Library**  
**February 6, 2012**

Thank you. It is a high honor for me to be asked to speak at the celebration of President Reagan's one hundred and first birthday, and I want to thank Mrs. Reagan and The Ronald Reagan Library for inviting me.

As RNC Chairman in 1994 I was delighted President Reagan allowed me to organize an eighty-third birthday dinner for a couple of thousand of his closest friends in Washington. It was a big GOP Gala, featuring Lady Margaret Thatcher and launching the 1994 campaign that led to the greatest mid-term majority sweep of the twentieth century.

As always, the President was spectacular, and it turned out to be his last public event in Washington.

That November he wrote me a very generous note about the '94 victory, and according to Annelise and Marty Anderson's book, Reagan: A Life in Letters, that note was the last personal letter President Reagan ever wrote anyone.

So, this opportunity is not only heady stuff for a boy from Yazoo City, Mississippi, it is a unique chance for me, his one-time White House Political Director, to put the 2012 presidential election in the context of Ronald Reagan's Republican Party.

Of course a hundred and one years ago, Ronald Reagan was born into a Democratic family, and he remained a Democrat for decades.

But the Republican Party of 1911 was in what would become a familiar state: a divided party, with two wings.

The next year Woodrow Wilson, a Democrat and one of only three men elected and re-elected president without ever receiving a majority of the popular vote, won the White House because of the split. He got to run against two Republican presidents: Theodore Roosevelt and William Howard Taft, so great was the rift in our party.

For nearly seventy more years the Republicans were basically divided. Dewey vs. Robert Taft; Rockefeller vs. Goldwater; even Ford vs. Reagan.

But after 1980 Ronald Reagan put a stop to that; he melded the GOP into one broad mainstream. It was, and is, the conservative party of the United States, while the Democrats are the liberal party.

He didn't unite our party by pushing pastels, or trying to find the lowest common denominator. Reagan never had his finger up in the wind, trying to figure out what to be for.

He flew under bold, bright colors, and everybody knew where he stood.

He stood for individual freedom and personal responsibility; for smaller, limited government, with lower taxes and less spending, with rational regulation. He was a free trader and an internationalist, who realized that the path to peace was through strength.

Certainly he was the most conservative president of my lifetime; and the most successful.

In the 2012 campaign every candidate has invoked Reagan and compared him or herself to Reagan. I don't blame them a bit.

But let me make sure one thing about Reagan's Republican Party is clear: Reagan did not demand or expect everyone to agree with him on every issue. He wasn't a purist.

Indeed one of my favorite Reaganisms is, "Remember, a fellow who agrees with you eighty percent of the time is your friend and ally, he is not some twenty percent traitor."

President Reagan had an incredibly loyal following and one reason for this was that he recognized and tolerated the fact that his supporters didn't agree with him on everything. They knew where he stood, understood their differences on this issue or that, but they supported him.

In 2012 some candidates are vying to be the most conservative candidate, and some voters are seeking purity in their choice.

In politics, purity is a dead dog loser. You need unity, and purity is the enemy of unity.

In a party that will receive some seventy million votes in the November election, it's silly to think that everybody will agree on everything. My wife and I don't agree on everything.

Reagan not only knew all his supporters wouldn't agree with him on every issue, he also knew he had to compromise in order to achieve his policy goals.

After all, Reagan had a Democratic majority in the House every day he was president. While there were still quite a few conservative House Democrats back then, the President had to compromise to get big things passed, and did he ever get them passed: the Reagan economic plan; Social Security Reform; Immigration Reform; the 1986 Tax Reform; to name a few.

These were big and hard to get enacted. But Reagan knew he had a Democratic House, and he had the skills and the commitment to negotiate the deals and pass the laws that helped end the malaise that had led to the worst recession since the Depression. His work made it Morning in America again. Indeed these policies led to the greatest explosion of economic growth and expanding prosperity in the history of the world.

For President Reagan politics was an aspiration, not a destination. He saw – and strove to reach that Shining City on the Hill, but he never imagined he'd get there in one fell swoop.

Instead, he moved us toward that ideal place and the principles it represented. Moving us is what motivated him. Despite his career as an actor, it was not the role to which Reagan aspired, but our achieving the goals.

He set the highest goals, but accepted progress toward those goals, one or a few steps at a time.

Ronald Reagan had an ideology, a strong philosophy with matching principles; but he was not an ideologue. He didn't let the perfect be the enemy of the good.

We admire him today not only for his vision but for his accomplishments. They resulted from his ability to accept imperfect improvement on the road to something even better.

President Reagan brought us together because he pushed us in the right direction. Results oriented, he left us a legacy of principled pragmatism.

That gave us a united Republican Party.

It also gave American presidents a model of leadership that is sorely missing today: a determination to work effectively with Congress, while being tolerant of those in either party who had different views from his own.

To be a good Republican you didn't and don't have to agree with President Reagan or anybody else on everything. Yes, we're the conservative party of the United States, but we are a big broad party with a wide mainstream. It's a party that in Reagan's day received sixty percent of the popular vote for president and carried every state but one.

Reagan's vision and the results it produced meant sixty percent of American voters voted for him; and we must always run our party so that the sixty or so percent of voters, who are willing to vote for our candidate for president or governor, feel comfortable and welcome in the GOP, not that they will agree on every issue.

Both our eventual nominee and our supporters know the stakes of this year's presidential election. Whoever we nominate will not be perfect.

But whoever wins our nomination will, along with President Obama, present America with two dramatically different visions of our nation and of the principles and policies needed for our future. Those two visions will be farther apart than any competing visions in our lifetime; and possibly ever.

The Obama Administration program was the biggest lurch to the left in our history. More spending, more borrowing, more taxing, more government control over the economy and our lives. And with miserable results.

And that is what the 2012 election must be about: Obama's policies and the terrible results caused by those policies.

Compare for a moment the record of the Obama-Pelosi-Reid program with that of Ronald Reagan's program, each having come into office facing enormous problems, economic and otherwise.

While the Obama campaign and its allies in the news media are hailing the "great" unemployment figures, this recovery is anemic, especially compared to the Reagan expansion of 1983 forward.

In fact, as Phil Gramm recently noted in the Wall Street Journal, Reagan's policies ignited a recovery so powerful that if it were repeated today, per capita GDP would be \$5,694 higher than it is with Obama's slow growth policies. That would equal \$22,776 more for a family of four. And instead of millions having dropped out of the workforce, some 16.9 million more Americans would have a job if the Reagan growth rate replaced the tepid outcomes under Obama. What kind of recovery is it when 1.2 million Americans became so discouraged that they quit looking for work last month alone? In January five times more people quit looking for work than got a job!

Unlike Reagan, Obama can't run on his record. If this election is about Obama's policies and the awful results those policies have produced, he'll be back in Chicago next year, organizing communities.

But we Republicans have to make the campaign a referendum on Obama's record, and not get hung up on purity from our nominee.

In 1980, I'm told President Carter's political aides celebrated Reagan's nomination, considering him the easiest Republican for Carter to beat. They thought moderate Republicans and Independents would abandon him; find him too conservative.

Of course, those moderates and Independents plus a lot of Democrats - who came to be known as Reagan Democrats - made 1980 a referendum on Carter's record; asking themselves, "Am I better off today than I was four years ago?" And Ronald Reagan became the fortieth president in a rout.

Our job is to set purity aside, and I think a lot of our fellow conservatives are coming to the conclusion that the stakes are too high to pursue perfection.

More than anything else, people ask me, "Who has the best chance to beat Obama? That's who I want to be for."

I remind them of Bill Buckley's old adage, "Our duty is to be for the most conservative candidate who can win in November." And remember, whoever we nominate will be far, far better than Obama.

Let me close by saying that Ronald Reagan's Republican Party must have a place for every voter who knows Barack Obama shouldn't be president - and that's a majority of Americans; and our mission is to make them feel welcome and needed as part of our effort: as voters, volunteers, or donors... and hopefully all three.

Our campaign must make this election a referendum on Obama's counterproductive policies and his record of failure.

Our attitude must be one of unity, because Americans are right to say they are concerned, for the first time in their lives, that their children and grandchildren will not inherit the same country they inherited.

The stakes of the election are that high, and if we practice what Ronald Reagan taught us, we will win a great victory in November.

Thank you for this honor. I hope I have done the President's legacy justice.