

The Conservative Political Action Committee Conference 2/19/87

The media are a topic that has probably gotten a lot of attention at this conference. I've often wondered, as we see what our President has to go through today, just what things must have been like 200 years ago. We're celebrating the bicentennial of our Constitution, as you know, and I've often wondered how our Founding Fathers would have fared if they had had to conduct the birth of our nation in the glare of television klieg lights, and with the type of media coverage that sometimes is given to the leaders of our country today.

And so as I was thinking about this, I thought — let's just take an example from our history books. Let's think about George Washington's historic crossing of the Delaware and his defeat of the Hessian troops, a very decisive battle in the Revolutionary War. How would that event have been covered by the news media if they treated that leader like they treat leaders of today?

Well, I suspect that these are some of the kinds of headlines might have been seen. For one thing, I suspect that the colonial forerunner of the New York Times would be telling us that the Continental Congress was outraged that General Washington engaged in military action without prior consultation with them.

I'm sure that the Trenton, New Jersey newspaper would chronicle the Governor's protest that his state had been used as a staging area without his approval.

You can imagine the 1770's version of the Philadelphia newspaper, that being the principal city at the time, would report that Washington had been severely castigated by the chairman of the Colonial Council of Churches for launching his expedition during the Christmas season.

And of course, the coverage wouldn't have been complete without the 18th century version of the Boston Globe, publishing a full-length interview with Benedict Arnold, under the headline, "Leadership Deficiencies in the Revolutionary Army."

Well, it's 200 years later, and actually, this is the year in which we enter the seventh year of the Reagan Administration. An Administration in which many of you, and some of us here, have had the privilege of serving.

The seventh year . . . if this were a football game, we'd just be entering the fourth quarter. The fourth quarter, not the end of the game, which is how too many people seem to be looking at things. They've forgotten that we have a whole quarter to play, and if you're an Oakland Raider fan, as I am, you know that that's plenty of time to do an awful lot.

In football, of course, when this quarter is over, the game is over. But, as you know, this isn't just another sports contest. For the people who are gathered in this room tonight, and for those attending this conference, the game will never be over, because we're going to keep on playing and playing and acting and acting and winning and winning.

We take great pride in calling ourselves members of the Conservative Movement. But I think we have to remember that it's a movement which was born long before this Administration began, and which will continue long after it's over.

It is a powerful movement because it is a movement built upon *ideas* — concepts of liberty and freedom that were born in the crucible of the American Revolution and that have made us the freest, strongest, most prosperous nation on earth.

I don't need to tell you of our commitment to these conservative ideals or of how they have literally changed the course of history in this country. Many of us in this room tonight are old enough to remember the 1930s and 40s, when the political left reigned virtually supreme on the intellectual scene, almost unopposed by any new ideas from conservative thinkers.

For those of you who don't remember those days, Neil Freeman's Television documentary "The Conservatives," which aired recently on PBS, will give you the flavor of what it was like in those decades immediately before and after World War II.

In fact, by 1950, Lionell Trilling could write that liberalism was not only the dominant tradition, but the sole intellectual tradition in the United States.

But then things started to change. It was also true that by the 1950s the names of a few hardy souls were beginning to gain some currency on the intellectual scene: Friedrich von Hayek, Richard Weaver, William F. Buckley, Jr.

There was a weekly journal that had begun publishing in the 1940s, *Human Events*, which became increasingly influential. And by 1953, the resurgence of conservative thought had been given form and description in Russell Kirk's great book *The Conservative Mind*.

And, incidentally, it was that same year that the Intercollegiate Studies Institute — which has had a tremendous impact on academic institutions, and has helped to train the people who now occupy positions of leadership in our country — was founded.

I was in college at the time that Bill Buckley, who had just recently graduated, dared to challenge the academic dogmas of that age by writing *God and Man at Yale*. And shortly after, buoyed on by the success of that book, a mild publication called *National Review* began to publish.

Well, I could go on with history, but most of you know it as well as I do. Anything I get wrong Cliff White will correct me on over here, because he was a big part of that history, and many others here too.

In 1960, Young Americans for Freedom was born. In 1964, of course, the Goldwater candidacy galvanized a whole new conservative generation. It was the start of translating public policy ideas into practical political capital.

From the ashes of that defeat rose the American Conservative Union. And people began at the same time to talk seriously about a man who, in the service of that campaign, on the strength of a single televised speech, became an overnight sensation in conservative circles.

Two years later, Ronald Reagan would become the governor of the largest state in the Union and would show that conservative ideals could be translated into practical politics and successful government.

But it was really in the 1970s that the Conservative Movement came into its own. At the beginning of that decade, the historians tell us that there were only about 200 conservative writers and scholars who were regularly called upon by public policy organizations. But just eight years later, by 1978, not even an eight-volume catalog published by the Heritage Foun-

dation — itself a creation of the mid-70s — could list all of the people who were now intellectuals in the conservative movement. Dozens of new organizations grew up, including, in California, where I was at the time, the Pacific Legal Foundation and the Institute for Contemporary Studies.

And we really knew the tide was beginning to turn during that decade when two of the most brilliant conservative economists in America received Nobel Prizes for their work; Friedrich von Hayek, in 1974; and Milton Friedman in 1976. Free market economics was finally getting the world-wide attention it deserved!

But perhaps one of the most significant events of the decade was the convening of the very first Conservative Political Action Conference here in Washington in 1974.

It's hard to overestimate the importance of that gathering because it took a lot of isolated individuals and a lot of different groups, and brought them together under a single banner. And for the first time these representatives of different organizations that covered such a wide range of interests, views and issues got together to see what would happen and what could be done to infuse the American political thinking with these new ideas.

It was at that point, in my opinion, that the tide really turned and the conservatives in this country became the group that had the new ideas and the ideas that caught fire, particularly among the young people of our country.

Of course, there can be little doubt that it was that 1974 meeting, and the events surrounding it, that set in motion a series of events that culminated in the extraordinary battle during the Republican presidential primary race less than two years later. It led ultimately to Ronald Reagan becoming the focus of a movement that sought something better than the weary and worn attitudes of a political establishment that seemed uninspired and devoid of ideas. It's significant, I think, that Ronald Reagan was the keynote speaker at that first CPAC conference in 1974.

And look at what has happened since then! Look what a different world we have today than when people were just thinking about how they could translate these new ideas into practical political action.

Ironically, one of the problems we all face today in trying to perpetuate conservative ideals and to convince the country that this is the right way to go — no matter the torrent of opposition on many campuses, in the news media and elsewhere, from those who try to be nay-sayers to the success of the ideas that have been wrought over this decade and a half.

Our problem is that our people have memories that are just too short. They don't remember how bad things were when this Administration took office at the beginning of 1981.

Things are sufficiently good now for most people in this country that they've forgotten the inflation that peaked out at 13.5 percent in 1980, but which has been barely more than 1 percent over the past 12 months — the lowest annual rate in 21 years.

Too many people have forgotten when the prime rate was at 21.5 percent and when mortgage rates were at 15 percent, where almost no one could buy a home at those prohibitive prices. Now, the prime rate has fallen to 7.5 percent, and in some places even lower, the lowest in nine years. Mortgage rates have fallen to about nine percent, which means that a lot of Americans today can have the dream of the average American citizen, to own their own home.

I could go on with the economic statistics. Disposable income has increased by some 23 percent since 1982. And do you remember when they talked about the misery index during that campaign of 1980? Well, it was at 20 at that time, and if you put the same figures together today, you find that it's at about 8.5, a tremendous drop in just a period of six years.

That's why tonight I'd like to talk a little bit about what's ahead, because I think some people are either lulled into a sense of security by success, or are apprehensive because not enough is happening, or otherwise are uncertain about where the movement is going or what can be done during the next two years. In response to that, I would suggest that we have no greater task than continuing to advocate and to impress upon the Congress, and upon the bureaucracy, and upon every institution of government and public policy, that President Reagan's policies of controlling big government, reducing federal taxes, reducing regulation and slowing the growth of government spending must be continued so that we can go on producing an economic resurgence that is now well into its fifth year of creating jobs, increasing incomes, controlling inflation and interest rates, and reducing poverty.

At the first CPAC, the country generally felt, because we had been told, that the only thing standing between us and nuclear destruction was reliance on a theory called "MAD" — M-A-D — Mutual Assured Destruction, subscribed to by the whole political establishment, Republican and Democrat.

Yet today, our conservative President is winning the battle to actually defend ourselves from the possibility of attack through his Strategic Defense Initiative, a part of our American strategy that must be preserved.

At our first gathering back in 1974, the decline of U.S. military power was just beginning, on the heels of ignominious defeat in Vietnam, caused by the failure of politicians, not soldiers. Drug use in the military, unfortunately, was widespread. Within a few years, our Navy would shrink to a dangerously small force, our readiness would decline, and morale would plummet, as the condition of soldiers and sailors and airmen was driven downward by poor pay and inattention.

Well, today, President Reagan is on the verge of achieving the 600-ship navy he called for in 1981. Our readiness has been upgraded sharply. I've been overseas and at military posts in this country, and I can assure you that morale is high, military pay is more commensurate with the risks and hardships that our soldiers face, and one thing is surely true: America is once again proud and appreciative of the armed forces that represent us around the world.

Another thing to remember about 1974: the Clark Amendment barred us from trying in any way to roll back the advance of Marxism in Angola, and Congress had sounded retreat in the face of Marxist expansion the world over. That was the time when people were starting to say that Marxism was the wave of the future, and somehow democracy in America was on a downward track — that we were old hat — and that it was just a matter of taking the lesser of undesirable alternatives for the future.

But again, thanks to the conservative movement and to the leadership of Ronald Reagan, the United States is supporting freedom-fighters in Angola, Afghanistan and Nicaragua. And we have seen how U.S. forces, in an operation that did not have any leaks, delivered the Caribbean nation of Grenada from being a Marxist bastion in this Hemisphere, and today that nation has joined the growing ranks of democracies in the world.

At the first CPAC, the nation was in the grip of the drug culture, something that grew out of the '60s and was at its high water mark in the 70s, with Timothy Leary inviting America to tune in, turn on and drop out, and the media writing approvingly about the virtues of the "counter-culture." Today, we have a President, and a President's wife, who are leading the country out of the drug culture, and where today we have the largest combined federal, state and local assault on drug traffickers and drug abuse, and where today we're taking away the market for drugs by teaching people that "just say no" is something that is going to improve the health and the society of our entire country.

Then there's the topic of taxes. Fifteen years ago, the conventional wisdom was that taxes could only go one way — they could only go up, they could never go down. Well, with the help of Jack Kemp and many of the people in this room, we first slashed the overall tax burden in 1981. And last year, in the President's tax reform bill, who would have guessed that even liberal Democrats would be helping to deal a body blow to the progressive income tax system, and slash the top rate from 50% to 28%? This is the kind of thing that has happened as ideas did in fact have consequences, and as principles and ideals were put into practical action.

We've gotten away from the idea that we had to have a "no growth" system in which there was no room for expansion, and we all had to have smaller shares of a shrinking pie. Today, in fact, we have just the opposite. We have a tremendous economic recovery that has gone on for 51 consecutive months, the longest period in post-World War II history. During that economic recovery, the pie has indeed gotten larger, as we have created more than 12.5 million new jobs in this country, despite a period where we had to work very hard during an economic recovery.

But there are other ways in which the successes of this period are continuing. In 1974, we were still reeling from the Supreme Court decision in *Roe v. Wade*, in which the Court abandoned the constitutional doctrines of federalism and separation of powers. Today, instead, we have a conservative President who believes in these principles, and we have taken our argument that such decisions should be returned to the states. Today, in the courts and interestingly enough, in this bicentennial year, in law schools and schools of all sorts, and in public forums, people are starting to talk about the Constitution and what it means. We have a debate raging on what I have called the jurisprudence of original intent. Distinguished jurists, academics and politicians are once again taking seriously the proposition that judges should be faithful to the actual text of the Constitution and the structure of government it establishes when they interpret the law.

One man takes his fidelity to the Constitution very seriously. It is our President. Speaking not long ago at the swearing-in ceremony for Justices Rehnquist and Scalia, and in the presence of retiring Chief Justice Burger, the President said of them:

"All three men understand that the Founding Fathers designed a system of checks and balances, and of limited government, because they knew that the great preserver of our freedoms would never be the courts or either of the other branches alone. It would always be the totality of our constitutional system, with no one part getting the upper hand."

And then the President went on to say:

"And that's why the judiciary must be independent. And that is why it also must exercise restraint. So our protection is the Constitution itself."

And that's really what our movement is all about. Taking the Constitution, taking principles of free markets, taking the ideals of individual liberty, and translating them into action.

In any case, I think it's safe to say that a century from now, historians will look back at the past decade or two and see it as one of the most significant periods in our political history. The Reagan Revolution — the *conservative* revolution — has literally transformed the political landscape of America.

But make no mistake — we are far from finished. We don't want to ride out the fourth quarter of this game hoping simply to have scored the most points when time runs out and leaving the initiative to the other side.

I don't think any of us in this Administration believe in “coasting” for the rest of our time here, and I know, without any question in my mind whatsoever, that the President doesn't believe in coasting, and he's going to be leading the country for the next two years.

Last month, when the President delivered his State of the Union Address, he also sent to the Congress a detailed description of his plan of action for the coming year. Some of the writers who care very little for the conservative agenda ignored this impressive document. But it represents a blueprint for expanding and building on the Reagan Revolution.

Another president, having tackled the problem of over-regulation early in his administration, might have stopped at that. But President Reagan has served notice that we're not done in this area. Vice President Bush's Task Force on Regulatory Relief is taking a fresh look at our regulatory structure from the standpoint of how we can improve our ability to compete at home and abroad. We will push for legislation to complete the job of deregulating the trucking industry, and continue to press for full deregulation of the pricing and transportation of natural gas and an end to the regulation of oil pipelines.

I can personally attest to some of the other things that I've seen the President approve and expect to get done over the next two years: things like developing of a new national strategy to reform our welfare system; putting into place new policies that strengthen the role and bond of families in American life; and reviving federalism, that balance between state and federal government, as a guiding principle of our constitutional system.

In the area of welfare reform particularly, the man who successfully staged an almost impossible-to-achieve but ultimately successful welfare reform program in California, and who stopped a federal onslaught toward a guaranteed annual income, wants to create a system that gives the poor the opportunity and the help they need to escape the welfare trap, and become self-reliant contributors to American society. And we want to do it by returning authority to the states, who ultimately have the responsibility to administer our public assistance programs and who have the capability to do so in a better and more cost-effective manner.

Needless to say, the subjects of welfare reform and supporting the American family are intertwined. Few programs have had a more adverse effect on the family than the welfare system. When it comes to supporting the American family, it seems to me that our first thing that government leaders, politicians, congressmen and executive branch people ought to remember is to follow the doctor's oath, and that is, the federal government should make sure that it does no harm.

Well, these are some of the things that lie ahead. We're going to continue to work for a balanced budget amendment to the Constitution, and the President is determined to get the

line-item veto. It is these tools that can help this President bring the federal budget into a course that will ultimately lead it into balance, and it is absolutely necessary to have these tools to make sure it doesn't get out of balance in the future. It is also important that our budget balancing efforts and our reduction of the deficit be done without raising taxes from the point we've won so far.

Well, this is only a partial list of what the President has sent to Congress, but I think that it's indicative of the fact that there's a lot of work that must and can be done. It's important that we all continue, as the people did in 1974, when they first met at a conference similar to this one: they put their shoulders to the wheel, and they figured out how together we could market these ideas to a waiting audience throughout America.

They figured out how they could translate conservative principles into what is now the mainstream political thinking of our country. With the tremendous advantage that we enjoy today over 1974, there should be no stopping the President in his efforts to accomplish the tremendous agenda he has set for the nation.

Sometimes, it's easy to fall into the trap of believing that life in Washington is just a series of political skirmishes in which you win a few and lose a few. At times, when some of the local newspapers have been clobbering us over the head for days on end; when liberal Democrats in Congress have been raking us over the coals with their usual partisan glee; it's tough to remember the big picture.

Perhaps one way of describing what's happening is to compare our situation to the ocean: look out over the water — of course, here on the east coast, they have the ocean on the wrong side for us Californians — and all we see are whitecaps that last a few minutes and then crash on the beach and disappear. In our situation, those are the everyday issues and problems we've got to deal with in the hothouse atmosphere of Washington. But out there in that vast ocean there are deep, strong currents running powerfully below the surface.

Our ocean is the American body politic. And the deep, powerful currents that lie out there in that ocean, and that continue to run no matter what appears on the surface, are conservative currents.

I believe that there is a strong and abiding belief in the values and principles that you and I share among the American people generally. They believe strongly in the family. They believe strongly in the principles of limited government, federalism and separation of powers that have made our political system uniquely successful, and in the document that is the longest-enduring constitution in the history of the world.

The American people believe in economic liberty, the work ethic, and freedom in the marketplace. They believe in equality of opportunity for all. They believe that every human being, wherever in the world they may live, are entitled to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. They recognize Marxism for what it is: a horrible threat to human freedom.

The American people have long held such views. But it has taken the tireless efforts of all of you in this room, your colleagues around the country, and all who have contributed to the conservative movement over the past 35 years, to rekindle the knowledge that these values are fundamental to our survival as a free nation. It has taken a popular and gifted president to assure the American people that there's no need to feel embarrassed to hold these views; indeed, that they are deeply embedded in the American spirit.

These are the values and beliefs of a conservative majority in our country. They are the foundation upon which we must build the future of the conservative movement, not just for the next two years, but for the next twenty, and the next 200. For those of you who have been watching a particular program on television this week, they are the values of America spelled with a “c,” not a “k,” and that “c” stands for conservative.

Thank you.