

Trump vs. The standard of Ronald Reagan

Donald Trump has dominated much of the Republican Primary over the past few months and has carved out for himself a wide popular appeal with the American voter.

Despite his historic run, there are still conservatives and Evangelicals who strongly oppose his candidacy. The two reasons for their opposition are an insufficient conservative ideology and issues of moral character.

In order to determine the legitimacy of these concerns, it would be helpful to compare Trump to a true standard of American conservatism. Instead of using the comparison of contemporary Republicans like Cruz, Rubio and Bush, this study would be best served if Trump was held to a much higher standard, that being the conservative icon, Ronald Reagan.

We often hear Ronald Reagan invoked in speech after speech as the true representative of American Conservatism for the last half of the twentieth century. For conservatives, Reagan is THE standard for conservative politics. He is the standard in character, the standard in conservative ideology and the standard in his conduct as President.

This brief comparison of Trump vs. Reagan will range from areas of personal faith, morality to political policies.

PERSONAL FAITH

TRUMP: Trump was a Presbyterian from his upbringing with his Scottish-born mother.

Gwenda Blair in an October 6, 2015 article for Politico writes of Trump's parents' religion, Trump's religious upbringing, and the influence of their NY Presbyterian pastor Norman

Vincent Peale:

His parents, Fred and Mary, felt an immediate affinity for Peale's teachings. On Sundays, they drove into Manhattan to worship at Marble Collegiate Church, where Peale was the head pastor. Donald and both his sisters were married there, and funeral services for both Fred and Mary took place in the main sanctuary.

"I still remember [Peale's] sermons," Trump told the Iowa Family Leadership Summit in July. "You could listen to him all day long. And when you left the church, you were disappointed it was over..."

In his adult years there is not an indication that he was a regular churchgoer. However, Trump remains a strong advocate of Christianity.

REAGAN: Reagan also was raised Presbyterian by his mother in Illinois. He attended church as a youth, but there is not much of a record of his church attendance when he moved to Hollywood at 26. He was never noted as a consistent church attendee. He joined Bel-Air Presbyterian Church in Los Angeles and was a member from 1988 until his death in 2004.

Reagan, like Trump, was never outspoken about his faith, but he was a strong supporter of the Christian faith.

MORAL BACKGROUND OF TRUMP AND REAGAN

TRUMP: Trump's colorful strong outspoken personality offends some Evangelicals. Evangelical leaders complain that his moral shortcomings disqualify him from public office.

REAGAN: Ronald Reagan had two very different lives: one in Hollywood and one in politics. When Reagan came to Hollywood he became a relentless womanizer. Some of the women associated sexually with Reagan were Lana Turner, Betty Grable, Susan Hayworth, Ava Gardner, Patricia Roc, Piper Laurie and Marilyn

Monroe. His recent biographers report up to 50 women with whom he was sexually involved. His promiscuity continued between his first and second marriages. It seems with his second marriage to Nancy Davis he, to his credit, amended his lifestyle and became a stable husband and father, and he and Nancy were blessed with 52 years of marriage.

MARRIAGE / DIVORCE

TRUMP: Trump has been married three times.

- First: Ivana Zelnícková (1977–1991)
- Second: Marla Maples (1993–1999)
- Current: Melania Knauss (m. 2005)

REAGAN: Reagan was married twice.

- First: Jane Wyman (1940–1949)
- Second: Nancy Davis (1952–2004)

Christian Right leaders constantly vilify Trump for his three marriages but never mention Reagan's two. Is there a new religious standard where two marriages is okay, but three is over the limit? Are two marriages acceptable but the third becomes a great moral defect?

POLITICAL PARTY AFFILIATIONS

TRUMP: Most of his life he has been registered as a Democrat. In 2012 he switched back to the Republican Party and remains there today.

Republican: 1987–99, 2009–11, 2012–Present

Independent: 2011–2012

Democratic: before 1987, 2001–2009

Reform: 1999–2001

REAGAN: He grew up in Illinois as a Democrat and remained so for much of his life including most of his time in Hollywood. In 1962, at the age of 51, he changed party affiliation to

Republican.

[Bear in mind that the Democratic party of the past is not the same as the Democratic party of today. The Democratic party of today has embraced much if not all of the Communist platform and ideology.]

POLITICAL ENDORSEMENTS

TRUMP: The record of who Trump gave campaign money to is discussed often by his opponents. Some of the high-profile Democrats Trump gave campaign funds to are the Clintons, Chicago mayor Rahm Emanuel, Harry Reid, Ted Kennedy and Charlie Crist. In fairness to Trump, he gave this as a businessman, not as a politician. He also endorsed Mitt Romney in 2012.

REAGAN: It would be difficult to follow Reagan's trail of campaign donations, but his endorsements are clear. Here are some of them:

- WWII-era: Endorsement of FDR
- 1948 Election: Endorsement of Democrat Harry Truman over Republican Thomas Dewey
- 1948 Senate: Endorsement of Democrat Hubert Humphrey of Minnesota
- Other: He also was a strong advocate of radical union leader Walter Reuther.

In fairness to Reagan, he made these endorsements before his political career.

REAGAN ON POLITICAL POLICY

GUN CONTROL:

- In California, he signed a Mulford Act which prohibited the carrying of firearms on one's person in public buildings, in the street and in one's auto.
- As President in 1986, he signed the Firearm Owner's

Protection Act, which banned any fully automatic rifle that was not already registered by the date of the bill.

- He supported the Brady Bill.

TAXES:

- In California, he raised taxes 7 out of the 8 years he was in office.
- As President, he pushed through a \$3.3 billion fuel and gas tax.
- Social Security tax increased \$165 billion over the 7 years of his presidency.
- He raised corporate taxes by \$120 billion over 5 years and closed loopholes for another \$300 billion in the same period.

AMNESTY:

- He granted amnesty to 3 million illegal immigrants in 1986 bypassing Congress.

HOMOSEXUAL RIGHTS:

- In California he strongly opposed the Briggs Initiative to ban homosexuals from teaching in the California public schools.

FEDERAL SPENDING AND DEBT:

- He stated pre-election that he was going to eliminate the Departments of Energy, Education and Veteran Affairs. They were never eliminated. Instead they were given significant budget increases during his presidency.
- Presidents Ford and Carter grew the federal government by 1.4%; Reagan by 3%. The national debt under Reagan tripled from \$900 billion to \$2.7 trillion.
- Federal entitlements went from \$197.1 billion in 1981 to \$477 billion in 1987.

FOREIGN AID:

- Foreign aid rose in Reagan's presidency from \$10 billion to \$22 billion. He also increased America's contribution to the International Monetary Fund by \$8.4 billion.

These numbers can be confirmed by Sheldon L. Richman's article, "The Sad Legacy of Ronald Reagan."

TRUMP ON POLITICAL POLICY

Trump has strong positions against gun control, federal taxation and illegal immigration. He has stated that as President he wants to eliminate the Department of Education and have education handled locally. Trump is also adamant on drastically reducing foreign aid.

Is it possible that Trump is actually more politically conservative than Reagan? I will leave that question to the reader to answer.

REAGAN ON SOCIAL ISSUES

NO-FAULT DIVORCE:

On September 5, 1969, as governor of California, Reagan signed the nation's first no-fault divorce bill. After California's lead, by 1973, 25 more states penned no-fault divorce legislation. No-fault divorce proved to be one of the most destructive laws for the break-up of the American family. Because of the unprecedented destruction of the American family, spawning many of today's politically active "pro-family" activist and lobby groups – thanks in no small part to Reagan.

ABORTION:

Six months into his governorship, on June 14, 1967, Reagan signed the Therapeutic Abortion Act. North Carolina, Hawaii and California were the first three states to legalize abortion. Abortions in California went from an average of 518 a year to over 100,000.

Reagan's cabinet secretary and de facto chief of staff, Bill Clark, who was a strong Catholic, gave Reagan mountains of anti-abortion material to consider. Reagan still signed the bill.

Later, Reagan greatly regretted signing the bill and subsequently became a strong pro-life defender.

TRUMP ON SOCIAL ISSUES

Trump, like Reagan (and the Bushes), has moved from a pro-abortion position to anti-abortion.

CONCLUSION

Within the American conservative and Christian Right leadership there seems to be an accepted double standard: one in which everything Trump has said or done in his pre-political days as a businessman can and will be used against him; conversely, whatever Ronald Reagan did or said before or during his presidency is forgivable.

I ask, why does Reagan get a free ride on personal morality and political policies, yet Trump's every move is scrutinized, critiqued and vilified? It is obvious Reagan is given a pass on all of his issues, and Trump's issues, which are fewer, are vilified to the heavens. Why the double standard?

What I would say to the conservative and Christian Right leadership is to be consistent in their candidate evaluation process. Do not single out one candidate for wrath while you pass on the others. You owe it to the Republican and Evangelical voter to be consistent.

Furthermore, I cannot imagine anything Trump could say or do morally or politically that could put him in a more damning place than Reagan's two signatures on those terrible no-fault divorce and abortion bills. Yet, American conservatives who know of these two dreadful pieces of legislation also knew of

Reagan's remorse for what he did and responded with leniency and grace, forgiving Reagan.

Should not that same grace be available to other political candidates guilty of lesser sins?

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