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Reagan's Playbook for American Renewal

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The challenges facing America in 2022 are remarkably similar to those of 1982. Yet as Joe Biden prepares to give his first State of the Union address, the American people need him to strike the tone and solutions favored by Ronald Reagan when he took the same stage four decades ago. Sadly, the past year proves it won't happen.

We need a Reagan. We have a Carter. What a difference a President makes.

History isn't repeating itself, but it's rhyming. Soaring inflation. Runaway federal spending and debt. Rampant crime in our cities. Radical leftists running our universities. Violent Islamists holding Americans hostage. A Russian invasion of a sovereign nation. An evil communist regime that wants to bury us. These challenges present us with a radical choice. We can reject America's time-tested principles and make the situation so much worse – which is the Biden approach – or we can apply those principles in novel yet necessary ways, as Reagan did.

Reagan would be the first to say we shouldn't do exactly as he did, because every era requires creativity and imagination suited to the moment. But we must absolutely *believe* as he did in our principles. We need the unshakable conviction that America is worth defending and the unwavering optimism that we can and will come through these trials, even if we have to wait a little longer.

“Together, after 50 years of taking power away from the hands of the people in their states and local communities, we have started returning power and resources to them.”

That was the central message of Ronald Reagan’s 1982 State of the Union. But no such words will come from Joe Biden this month, and probably ever, because his vision for America is profoundly different. Forget the experiment in *self-government*. We’re living through an experiment in *socialist* government. In a single year, Biden has sought to fundamentally change the relationship between the American people and the federal government. His agenda would make dependency the default and put D.C. in charge of much of our daily life. While the president sells this revolution as giving power to the people, it is nothing of the kind. It can only be accomplished by taking power *from* the people and putting it in the hands of a ruling class in a distant capital.

Unelected and unaccountable bureaucrats have never had more say over where we work, what we buy, how we live – even how we breathe. They spend their days destroying jobs they don’t like, hurting families they don’t know, and creating one-size-fits-all mandates for situations they can’t understand. In the Biden White House, the assumption is that central planners are way smarter than 330 million Americans.

Few beliefs are more wrong-headed. The source of America’s peerless progress has always been -- and always will be -- the creative genius of our people, who have turned the impossible into the inevitable time and again. History proves that putting our trust in D.C. is dangerous, but the past isn’t the only proof. We need only look at what Biden is trying to do in the present.

America is on the cusp of its first-ever cradle-to-coffin welfare state. Programs once meant for the most vulnerable – like subsidized health care – now cover the [middle and even the upper class](#). Tens of millions of families have been told to expect monthly checks from the IRS, regardless of whether they need them, and the tried-and-true system of requiring work for government support has been all but destroyed. What’s worse, each new and expanded entitlement is leading to calls for still more, from free college to free rent. Welcome to the United States of Welfare.

The prevailing assumption is that the federal government can and should provide for the people's every want. But that's un-American. Government *can't* give us everything, and it *shouldn't* try. Few things are more dangerous than free people demanding and depending on the generosity of government. Yet that's the message we hear today from our nation's leaders. They're telling a single mom to give up and give in to a life of welfare. They're telling a laid-off worker to stop trying and stay home. They're telling students to expect more from others than they do of themselves. Ultimately, they're telling all of us that we shouldn't bother to dream or dare, because the government's got this.

What's happening right now is a moral tragedy. It has a human cost we can never calculate. But we can calculate the cost in dollars and cents. Not only is the Biden agenda squandering our people's potential, it's also stealing our families' wealth and well-being.

The same thief is trying to pick American's pockets from three different directions. First, the federal government is driving the worst inflation in more than 30 years. Prices are spiraling upward at the gas station, the grocery store, shopping online, and everywhere in between. Costs are rising so fast that paychecks can't keep up, and the typical American is now [making less than they were before Joe Biden took office](#).

Then there's taxes. Biden has tried to pass the largest tax hike in American history, and every family in the country would feel the squeeze. Wall Street is supposedly the target, but Main Street would get hammered too, even as mom-and-pop shops are trying to bounce back from the pandemic. History proves that higher taxes on job creators mean fewer jobs and lower wages for workers, adding insult to the injury of skyrocketing inflation.

Finally, Americans are going to have to pay back the trillions of dollars Joe Biden is adding to the national debt. The out-of-control spending is taking the country nowhere, but it has to come from somewhere, and that's us. With \$30 trillion in debt and trillions more on the way, our children and grandchildren will spend the rest of their lives trying to cover a bill they didn't rack up and can't pay down. If the past year has proved anything, it's that spending trillions of dollars won't solve our problems – it *is* the problem.

Hence the mess America's in. Rather than begin to clean things up, the president will surely use his State of the Union to propose ideas that would make things worse. He'll defend his failed policies while calling for more spending, more taxes, and more control for D.C., all of which means less freedom for Americans. There will be no echoes of 1982. Yet the wisdom of the past is needed in the present, and our national future depends on remembering it.

Even with the distance of time, Reagan's solutions still ring true.

He spoke of taming inflation by breaking, not boosting, D.C.'s spending habit. He spoke of bringing down gas prices by increasing, not limiting, our ability to achieve energy independence. He called for cutting taxes, not raising them, and slashing red tape instead of strangling families and businesses with mandates and rules. Reagan did exactly that, and the economy boomed. By contrast, Biden is overseeing a limping economy that, month after month, fails to meet even low expectations.

The difference could not be more stark. Biden is creating a welfare state for the middle class, believing it will secure his legacy. Reagan strove to protect entitlements for the least fortunate. Where the 46th president has ramped up corporate welfare for politically favored companies, the 40th urged cutting corporate welfare.

And while Biden has dramatically expanded the size and scope of government, Reagan asked Congress to dismantle entire departments. While lawmakers failed to act on this noble idea, it has only grown more imperative. Every federal agency claims to be indispensable for our republic, but only a fraction are. Most Americans have no idea what the bloated bureaucracy in D.C. actually does. If we don't know it, we probably don't need it, and we definitely won't miss it.

These policies mean taking power away from Washington. But it's equally important to give that power back to its rightful owners. That means the people, who know how to spend money better than politicians ever could. It also means returning power to the states, something Reagan emphasized at length in 1982. He pointed out that Washington's gobbling up of power made "our citizens feel

they've lost control of even the most basic decisions made about the essential services of government, such as schools, welfare, roads, and even garbage collection.” That feeling is only stronger now, because D.C. is once again trying to do things best left to states.

I encountered that reality as Governor of South Carolina. My job was to make our state a better place to live, work, and raise a family, yet the federal government was our biggest barrier to success. It constantly tried to stop me from passing the reforms our state and citizens needed.

Take just one example: My welfare-to-work program helped 20,000 vulnerable people find jobs, but we could have helped countless more if the feds gave us more flexibility. And when companies like Boeing chose our state for new factories, the Obama administration sued to stop it. Jobs, education, the environment, you name it: we made great strides, but we could have done even more if Washington had less power and South Carolina had more. States know their citizens’ needs. They deserve the freedom to meet them.

Reagan made clear in 1982 that taking these steps would not be easy. He also warned that progress would take time, given how much damage he had to undo. Reagan got to work on the fixes, but 40 years later, Joe Biden is still breaking everything he can. He has three more years to make things worse.

The rest of us have a duty to show the country a path out of this mess. Stop the reckless spending. Unshackle the states. Unleash job creators and everyday people by restoring their freedom.

No matter the growing turbulence abroad, Biden is sure to spend most of his speech on his domestic agenda. Reagan did the same thing. Yet the 40th president’s brief comments on foreign affairs are as applicable now as they were then. Look no further than his call for “regaining the respect of America's allies and adversaries alike.”

America has gone from global leader to global laughingstock on Biden’s watch. While there are many reasons for this swift collapse, the withdrawal from

Afghanistan stands out. The Commander-in-Chief threw away two decades of service and sacrifice by America's heroes, including my husband. By letting Afghanistan fall to terrorists, Biden has insulted our friends and emboldened our enemies.

The United Kingdom – America's closest ally – censured Joe Biden. Our NATO allies ask why they supported the War in Afghanistan, and worse, wonder whether America is really committed to Europe's security. Our allies and partners on the other side of the world ask the same thing. Japan, Taiwan, Australia, and others worry that American strength and courage are fading at the worst possible moment.

Our enemies think so. The dust had hardly settled in Kabul before Iran, Russia, and China ramped up their aggression. Iran is doubling down on its nuclear program and support for terrorism. Russia has invaded Ukraine, throwing Europe into chaos and testing NATO's resolve, and Vladimir Putin is trying to recreate the Soviet Union.

And then there's Communist China. China is the single biggest foreign threat to America's future, and in the withdrawal from Afghanistan, Biden gave China its single biggest opening to strengthen itself at our expense. In every capital on earth, China is whispering to foreign leaders that America's era is over and the Chinese century has begun. From Asia to Africa to South America and beyond, Beijing boosts the Belt and Road Initiative to ensure its dominance of the global economy.

Most concerning is China's military buildup. It already has weapons America lacks and its armed forces are being designed to defeat us. China's daily threats to invade Taiwan are not idle, but a signal of Beijing's intent. The Communist Party is preparing for war – a war it believes it can finally win.

Only American strength can stop China's aggression. Reagan knew as much in the struggle against the Soviet Union. In 1982, he called for a "substantial program to enhance our military forces." Yet today we have a president who [proposed cutting funding for the military](#). At a time when America needs renewed strength, Biden is making us weaker.

Now is the time to invest in our military, keeping it ten steps ahead of the Chinese threat. And military strength isn't all we need. Moral clarity matters even more.

Forty years ago, Ronald Reagan called for a "recognition of what the Soviet empire is about" – something the political establishment refused to do. We need a similar recognition about China's regime. Communist China is the focal point of evil in the 21st Century. It does not want to compete with freedom and democracy. It wants to destroy freedom and democracy, especially in America.

We can never let that happen. To defeat this enemy, we must call it what it is. And once we have moral clarity, we can finally marshal our economic strength and military might to leave Communist China on the ash-heap of history.

When Reagan called for a national renewal, at home and abroad, he summoned Americans to believe in our country and bring out its best. That patriotic, can-do spirit must be rallied once more, but the task is much harder in 2022 than it was 1982. People aren't just losing faith in our future. They're losing faith in America itself.

We are living through a crisis of self-loathing. Every day, more and more of our fellow citizens think that living here is a curse, not a blessing. You hear it on the news. You read it on social media. You see it in rage and riots on our streets. There is a growing sense, endorsed by many in power in D.C., that America isn't worth renewing because it's always been rotten to the core.

This crisis did not come about naturally. It was deliberately stoked by people who despise America's guiding principles and want to rebuild the country on a radically different foundation. What started at colleges has now spread to K-12 classrooms, corporate boardrooms, media green rooms, and the backrooms of government at every level. The situation is much worse than "woke culture" or "critical race theory." We've come to a place where the President of the United States says America is tainted by systemic racism, and virtually the entire Democratic Party agrees.

It's a stunning claim with staggering implications. If America's principles are inherently racist, then a completely new set of principles is needed. Sure enough, we're now told that liberty, free speech, equality, and the rule of law are tools of oppression and therefore on the outs. Government control, censorship, discrimination, and the raw exercise of power are in. The Biden agenda unquestionably trends in that dangerous direction.

Nothing threatens America more than this national self-loathing – not even Communist China. We won't defend our country if our people think it's indefensible. We won't rebuild our economy or regain our global strength if we deny the principles that form our national foundation. Most of all, if we refuse to admit the progress we've made, we won't move America even closer to its promise of liberty and justice for all.

America is a magnificent work in a progress. It deserves our love and demands our hard work. Students should be taught the flaws of our history, but also the greatness of it. CEOs should be exhorted to build up our country, not tear it down. Ultimately, every citizen of these United States should be reminded that while America isn't perfect, the principles at the heart of America are perfect, and the time has come to apply them more fully.

That's our national story, after all. America's promise sparked a fire in the hearts of Frederick Douglass, Abraham Lincoln, and the abolitionists who ended slavery. It moved the minds of Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, the suffragettes, and all who've made women's rights a reality. That promise filled the air when Martin Luther King, Jr. told us of his dream. It was made more real with the end of segregation and the victory of civil rights. And I've seen America's promise unfold in my own life.

I'm the proud daughter of Indian immigrants. We were the only Indian family in our small, rural Southern town, population 2,500. My dad wore a turban and still does to this day. My mom wore a sari. Nobody knew who we were, what we were, or why we were there. I was a brown girl in a black-and-white world. Every day, my family faced stares, whispers, suspicion, and exclusion.

But then something very American happened. Slowly, those stares turned into smiles. Those whispers turned into words of friendship. We went from being left

out to welcomed in. Not every day was great. But nearly every day was better than the one before. I haven't just seen the American story. I've lived the American story. And take it from me, the first female governor of South Carolina and the first *minority* female governor in the United States: America is not a racist country.

This truth must be said – loudly, clearly, and constantly – especially when leaders like Joe Biden say the opposite. We can all do more to water the seed of patriotism and tend to the future of the greatest nation the world has ever known.

When Reagan addressed Congress in 1982, America's recovery had begun, on the home front, on the world stage, and in the people's hearts and minds. It was still a tough time, but the difficulties of the past were starting to fade, and Americans began to face the future with hope – a hope that, in hindsight, we know was well placed.

As Joe Biden prepares for the 2022 State of the Union, the situation is very different. We are in the middle of tough times, not at their end. But we still have hope. Americans know we can do better, and when given the chance, we will choose better than the failed leadership on display in Washington. We already are.

Before the American people put their faith in Ronald Reagan's optimistic vision, they rejected Jimmy Carter's message of national decline. In the 1978 midterms, Republicans made gains in the House and the Senate and won governor's races across the nation. Those victories paved the way for Reagan's triumph in 1980. A similar groundswell is building now, and it's already shifting our country in the right direction.

Just two months ago, our fellow Americans voted for a new direction in the Virginia governor's race. They nearly toppled New Jersey's liberal governor – a race few people thought would be close – and chose common sense over crime and chaos in New York City, Minneapolis, and Seattle. Nationwide, the message

was clear: We choose individual freedom over government control, and belief in America over anger and despair.

That same message will drown out whatever Joe Biden says in his first State of the Union. From coast to coast, frustration is turning into action, and a new movement of Americans is preparing to turn our country around. The 2022 and 2024 elections could have the hallmarks of 1978 and 1980, when the people chose Reagan and faith over Carter and decline.

People are hungry for solutions to problems that keep getting worse. Reagan provided them. Yet the ideas he advocated weren't just his. They are ours. In fact, they belong to every generation, because those ideas are profoundly American. Empowering the people. Standing strong in the world. Believing in America – “the last, best hope of man on earth.” By applying those principles in our time, as Reagan did in his, we will ensure the state of our union is strong. That may not be the case right now, but the day of America's renewal is coming, as it always has.