

John Heubusch:

Good evening and welcome back to the Reagan Library. It has never felt better to be back in our home with so many friends that we have not seen in far too long. Thank you for coming this evening, and thank you so much for your steadfast support of the Reagan Foundation and Library during a time that's been difficult for many. But in honor of our men and women in uniform who defend our freedom around the world, if you would please stand and join me for the Pledge of Allegiance.

John Heubusch:

I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, and to the republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all. Thank you. Please be seated.

John Heubusch:

Before we get started, there's a few people I need to make sure we recognize this evening. I'll start with former Governor Pete Wilson, both a trustee and his wife, Gayle, is with us tonight as well. Governor, thank you for coming. Another of our trustees, Robert Tuttle, former ambassador to the United Kingdom, Robert. And of course, former Congressman Elton Gallegly, and his wife, Janice, Elton. So this is an evening about the future, and the future we're dealing with tonight had its beginning in 1964 with one man's rendezvous with destiny. In October of that year, Ronald Reagan, not yet a candidate for any office, delivered a nationally televised speech that sought to save his political prospects for his party in the upcoming presidential election.

John Heubusch:

That year's campaign, one that all of you, I know, are too young to remember, involved Senator Barry Goldwater's run for the presidency. His campaign, of course, wasn't successful, but the speech by Ronald Reagan, yeah, here we call it "the" speech, electrified Americans and changed everything. From the speech of Ronald Reagan was born an enduring movement, one that redefined a political party and reshaped a nation, no exaggeration. Ronald Reagan spoke that night of a time for choosing, and over the following decades, Americans would indeed choose his version of a sunny yet serious conservatism. A conservatism that has been an animating force, even the very lifeblood of the Republican Party that has been a beacon for freedom and liberty for nearly six decades.

John Heubusch:

Yet, as we gather here this evening, the Republican Party is facing another time for choosing. What will it represent in the years ahead? What does it stand for? Where is it going? You could rephrase that resonant question from President Reagan's farewell address in 1989. Can you hear his voice as he asks, "Instead of how stands that shining city on a hill, how stands the party? How stands the movement on this night?" It's a question a lot of people have been asking regardless of who you might have supported in the last presidential election. And it's also a question that the Reagan Foundation and Institute has come to answer with a speaker series that begins tonight. What will the Republican Party stand for in 2021, 22, 24?

John Heubusch:

It's a question on the minds of many, perhaps even including some of you tonight. How might President Reagan answer this question? We'll never know, but we do know he was clear-eyed, modern-minded and forward thinking in his own time. But that was then, this is now. Here at the Reagan Library, we're

not looking to promote old solutions to new problems. The question before us really is no longer, what would Reagan do? The question now is, what might he expect of us? It is indeed a time for choosing. No softball questions, no easy answers. We've asked the Republican Party's most capable leaders, most capable thinkers to address the hard issues, to address the tough questions. And you simply cannot host a speaker series of leading Republican minds without a former Speaker of the House, former Vice Presidential candidate, and thankfully now, trustee of the Reagan Foundation and Institute, Paul Ryan. That's just a fact.

John Heubusch:

It's also a fact that Paul Ryan is a leader whose eye is always on the horizon looking to find a new path ahead from his policy platform, A Better Way, to his book, The Way Forward. So who better to be our inaugural speaker for this time for choosing? We've asked him the same questions about the Republican Party's future that we will ask every speaker participating in this series. Tonight he is here with answers.

John Heubusch:

Before I give Speaker Ryan the floor, a personal observation about him, if I may. There are very few leaders of the Republican Party from my generation that I would place in the same class, the same stature, as the gentleman who rests in peace not 100 feet from where I stand. When it comes to courage and decency, fair-mindedness and love of country, Paul Ryan is one of them.

John Heubusch:

Ladies and gentlemen, please join me in welcoming to the Reagan Library, Speaker Paul Ryan.

Speaker Paul Ryan:

That was really something. Thank you, John. Really. Wow. That was not the introduction I was expecting. That was really something. Really appreciate it. What a beautiful night. Isn't it nice just to get outside together? This is just, it's glorious. I want to thank you, John. I want to thank everybody here at the Library. I want to thank everybody who spent all of these months this year, holding the place together here at the Library. From being on the board, I've just got to tell you, there are a lot of people here who put their lives into this Library and they've really held this institution up during very tough times. So I just want to thank all the folks here at the Reagan Library for enduring this difficult time and for keeping this place that we're so proud of, that we're all attached to, afloat and doing so well. So thank you for what all of you've done, everybody here at the Library.

Speaker Paul Ryan:

And I want to thank you, John. And I also want to thank my friend, Fred Ryan. I have the honor of serving with John and Fred Ryan on the Library's board of trustees. And though I may not be the most powerful Ryan on the board, I love being a part of it and I was just elated when I was asked to join the board. For more than two years now, I have been strictly a private citizen with no complaints whatsoever about that. Your invitation brings me here only as a lifelong admirer of President Reagan and a sound believer in what he stood for. So, it's a real privilege to kick off the Reagan Library's Time For Choosing series. I see it as a chance to share a few thoughts about the man, about the cause that defined his career. And as John mentioned, about the future of the party that he led. Ronald Reagan had nothing but good influence on the Republican Party in his time.

Speaker Paul Ryan:

I have a feeling you'll agree that we sure could use more of that today. I've been here a few times, and whenever I look around this place, it reminds me of my backyard in Janesville, Wisconsin actually. Now, but when I very seriously look around this place, I think about how my own life was influenced by the ideas and the spirit of someone I never even met. Even 40 years after President Reagan's first inauguration, we all remember him with a special respect and affection. He was exactly the man America needed at a crucial moment. We appreciate him only more from a distance of time now. To this day, whenever I'm asked to describe my own political outlook, there's no term that fits more comfortably than Reagan Conservative. I guess it started with my dad who was also named Paul. He wasn't really a political type, but there was never a more enthusiastic Reagan voter in the state of Wisconsin.

Speaker Paul Ryan:

I remember in 1980, I was 10-years-old. My dad pointed out a geographical connection, that the Rock River that ran straight through Janesville, Wisconsin, flowed straight down past Dixon, Illinois, where our new president spent his childhood. For a kid, there was something nice in knowing that he'd come from the same part of the world that we did. It was a long time before I ever took an active interest in politics, and when I did, I just naturally identified with the ideas of Ronald Reagan. Early in my career, I spent a lot of time in the company of a guy named Jack Kemp, a wonderful guy I still miss. And being around Jack was a daily immersion in the big hearted spirit of Reagan conservatism, its whole creed of free enterprise, of endless opportunity, of limited government and a limited role of government in a free society, respect for the rule of law, a system of checks and balances, the rights and dignity of every person in America as a country like no other, with work in the world that only we can do.

Speaker Paul Ryan:

The eight years of the Reagan presidency stand as evidence of all that those ideas can accomplish. Just think how different the world would look today without this one man whose arrival in American politics still seems providential. It's a measure of his impact that there are statues of this man, not just here in Simi Valley, but also in our Capitol rotunda, in London, in Gdańsk, Poland, in Warsaw, in Budapest, in Berlin near where the wall used to be, and in many other places where Reagan will always be an honored name. Our 40th president belongs to another era, for sure, but the ideas he championed, they are universal. They are as hopeful and as compelling as ever.

Speaker Paul Ryan:

Consider of the background of one new member of Congress, Victoria Spartz of Indiana. She's an immigrant from Ukraine who did not arrive in the United States until 1998 when she was 20-years-old. Socialism might be fashionable among some members of the House, but I have a feeling they're going to hear from their colleague, Victoria, who has seen socialism up close and knows exactly where it leads. And how do you think this representative, born in the Soviet Union, began her service in Congress? She arranged to take her oath of office standing by a portrait of Ronald Reagan. If we're looking for good signs in the Republican Party, this freshman member of the House, along with others like Young Kim from down in Orange County, Maria Elvira Salazar, Florida, and Tony Gonzales of Texas, they are high on the list. And looking for good signs is what we should be doing, even if in 2020 and in 2021, we have been a tough and disappointing time for the Conservative cause.

Speaker Paul Ryan:

Here's another good sign. With a strong showing of Conservative candidates, Republicans last year came very, very close to regaining a House majority. No one expected that, especially in an election cycle where we lost the presidency and then the Senate in a runoff. Of course, since 2016, we have learned to get used to big and unexpected things happening in American politics. Even for our good showing in the House, 2020 left Republicans powerless in Washington. Even worse, it was horrifying to see a presidency come to such a dishonorable and disgraceful end.

Speaker Paul Ryan:

So, once again, we Conservatives find ourselves at a crossroads and here's the reality that we have to face. If the conservative cause depends on the populist appeal of one personality or of second rate imitations, then we're not going anywhere. Voters looking for Republican leaders want to see independence in metal. They will not be impressed by the sight of yes men and flatters flocking Mar-a-Lago. We win majorities by directing our loyalty and respect to voters and by staying faithful to the conservative principles that unite us. This was true even when the person leading our movement was as impressive, polished and agreeable as they come.

Speaker Paul Ryan:

Maybe you recall Ronald Reagan's parting words in the proper farewell address of a successful two-term president. Here is how he acknowledged his reputation as a great communicator. He said, "I never thought it was my style or the words I used that made a difference. It was the content. I wasn't a great communicator, but I communicated great things. And they came from heart of a great nation from our experience, our wisdom and our belief in the principles that have guided us for two centuries." Now, President Reagan might have been underrating his talents just a bit, but he was right that leaders and eras, they come and go. It's only the cause that endures. That is critical to remember right now. And frankly, I don't think anyone should have trouble recalling our fundamental convictions.

Speaker Paul Ryan:

We have a democratic administration, Senate and House that are challenging those convictions and will keep doing so day after day. As we watch progressive work every level of power and every lever of power in all the elected branches in Washington, we'll have all the reminders we need of why conservatives believe in limited government, in spending discipline, and economic opportunity in pluralism and personal freedom. We're now seeing how one party rule from the left holds up in a center- right country.

Speaker Paul Ryan:

Joe Biden was put into the presidency by swing suburban voters, the kind who normally vote Republican, but in this case did so only for Congress and not for president. They expected a center-left unifier. The problem is he is focused on unifying, not the nation, but the democratic party surrendering to its progressive base. It's not been six months and already the administration is working toward over \$6 trillion in new spending this, even with a deficit that ran more than 200 billion last month alone. What is not covered with new borrowing will be funded with higher income taxes, payroll taxes, capital gains taxes, estate taxes, and more.

Speaker Paul Ryan:

In 2020, the country wanted a nice guy who would move to the center and depolarize our politics. Instead, we got a nice guy pursuing an agenda more leftist than any president in my lifetime. These

policies might have the full approval of his progressive supporters, but they break faith with the middle of the road folks who made the difference for him on election day. And for conservatives, this painful existence as the opposition can actually be an opportunity. Out of these years can come a healthy growing and united conservative movement, a movement that speaks again to the heart of a great nation.

Speaker Paul Ryan:

Consider how much we got done before the defeat of 2020. When we control the levers of power, what did we accomplish? Well, I was lucky enough to be Speaker of the House during that time. And the answer is that Republicans delivered on goals important to conservatives going all the way back to Goldwater and Reagan. They include a vital rebuilding of America's military and intelligence capabilities so that determined rivals cannot overtake us. The United States answered serious threats in serious ways with tough measures against China, Russia, Iran, and other hostile actors. We eliminated some of the worst excesses of the regulatory state allowing for greater freedom and economic growth.

Speaker Paul Ryan:

We made good on a promise to the veterans that the VA would better serve them and be held accountable when it fell short. In criminal justice, we corrected some terrible wrongs to give worthy people a chance at life beyond prison. We made serious progress in ridding the country of human trafficking and rescuing its victims. All this and more, along with Senate confirmed Supreme Court justices who endured vicious attacks from the left and will be a credit to their country for decades to come. And then there was the first major revision of the tax codes since 1986. The previous code was what people had in mind when they talked about the swamp. It was a constant drag on economic productivity and entrepreneurship, driving capital and jobs outside of the United States. It was such a fixture that few people thought it could be reformed and most had given up trying.

Speaker Paul Ryan:

We needed to lower the rates, clear away the favors and the clutter, and sharpen America's competitive edge. Tax reform was a big piece of business. I worked at it myself for two decades in Congress. And in 2017, we got it done. This is the main reason why, at the start of 2020, the United States was seeing such powerful and inclusive economic growth. We saw increased revenue from a broader tax base capital and jobs coming back to America, the best wage growth for low income earners in more than a decade and unemployment at a 50-year low for every demographic. These historic reforms were a triumph of practical conservative policy, a model of shared prosperity and upper mobility that we've always talked about. It was the populism of President Trump in action, tethered to conservative principles. And if anyone wondered, back in January 2020, what could possibly cut short this expansion of opportunity in America, we now know the one word answer, pandemic.

Speaker Paul Ryan:

That calamity along with some fiascos of the president's own making set the scene for our present challenges. Look, to his credit, Donald Trump brought many new voters into our party and we want them to stay. He's a former president now, but the issues and values that held so many Republican voters and turned so many Democrats into Republicans, those issues and values still matter. I'm proud of the long-standing promises Republicans made good on in those years. By any measure, it is a plus that we are now a party that more working people can identify with, a party that takes American sovereignty and the security of our border seriously. We're the party that has no illusions about China and its

influence in the world, and that too is a change for the better. In a lot of manufacturing towns and in other once forgotten places, people know who's speaking for them. And more than that, who's listening to them.

Speaker Paul Ryan:

Like the Reagan Democrats of another time, these voters feel respected in our party, respected for the work they do, for their way of life and for their love of country. I can't think of any better evidence that the Republican party has been doing at least a few things right. Having joined our ranks in the last five years, there is no reason these voters cannot go on adding their conviction and support to the conservative cause. All good meaning people from every background should feel welcome in the forward-looking, inclusive, aspirational movement that we must be. Take the populous energy of the recent years, combine it with the core principles of conservatism and the result will be a coalition even broader and stronger than yesterday's Republican party.

Speaker Paul Ryan:

I'm going to take a sip water while the plane goes by. So often though, as well, Republican populism is just the natural response to progressive elitism and the overarching agenda that goes with it. Never before has the left wing of the Democratic party held such influence as it does now, and we're seeing how that works out. I am betting that most Americans will not take well to more policies of wealth redistribution, more federal interference in their lives, more globalism at the expense of the national interest, and daily never-ending instruction in political correctness. The least appealing feature of the party in power is its constant use of identity politics.

Speaker Paul Ryan:

So many issues on the left bring up the same dreary view of America as a collection of groups in perpetual conflict with each other. What we could once dismiss as pretentious academic theory, confined to overworked dissertations and obscure journals somehow has become Democratic party orthodoxy. Everything has to be about race, gender, and class. Every person is just a stand-in for one group interest or another. That's identity politics. Constantly accusing, suspecting, claiming victimhood, pulling us apart from one another. And lately all of this has gone from ideology to obsession. But as the left gets more woke, the rest of America is getting weary. This stuff is exhausting. And we conservatives have got to be careful not to get caught up in every little cultural battle. Sometimes these skirmish that are just creations of outrage peddlers detached from reality and not worth anybody's time.

Speaker Paul Ryan:

They draw attention away from the far more important case we must make to the American people. Culture matters, absolutely, yes, but our party must be defined by more than a tussle over the latest grievance or perceived slight. We must not let them take priority over solution grounded in principle to improve people's lives, because politics based on racial or other identity is always a path to deeper and deeper hostility with sad and harmful consequences. And it is precisely the opposite of conservative thought. And we need to be frank, today, too many people on the right are enamored with identity politics in ways that are antithetical to Reagan conservatism.

Speaker Paul Ryan:

The whole idea in this country is that every person has worth and that our dignity, rights, and responsibilities, they all belong to us as individuals. The key identity that we all share is our humanity.

The group we all belong to is a free society where we all get to think for ourselves, where everyone has something to contribute, and where everyone deserves a chance to rise. In any time, but especially now, these conservative principles ring true, and they will always draw more men and women to our cause. Conservatism draws heavily on the wisdom of natural law, which can raise our sights. Beyond the selfishness and the grievance collecting of tribe against tribe And conservatism also places a premium on private virtue, believing as our founders did, that a free society depends on personal values, like honesty, duty, self-discipline, and a basic concern and respect for other people. The state does not exist to remake society or to reorder our lives.

Speaker Paul Ryan:

As President Reagan observed, government cannot be clergymen, teacher, and parent. It is our servant beholden to us. And along with this comes a confidence in the people themselves to make their own decisions as responsible members of the good, caring, fair-minded society that our constitution was designed for. Listening to the progressive left sometimes, you can easily overlook the irreplaceable role of families, churches, and communities in shaping the character of our country. For the left, it's always about expanding government power. I think of the federal debt, which hardly comes up anymore, even though the debt is now \$28 trillion. Look, we were forced to take extraordinary measures to respond to a global pandemic, but that effort is not permission to adopt a policy of limitless spending.

Speaker Paul Ryan:

Many consequences would arise out of a debt crisis. All of them bad, some of them catastrophic. If we want to remain the biggest economy, keep our standard of living, keep the dollar as the world's reserve currency, and meet our obligations to the seniors, to our veterans, to the poor, the disabled, it all comes back to spending discipline and the tax revenue that comes only with a pro-growth agenda. Everything rides on America getting ahead of this problem, and if conservatives do not show the way and too often, we have not, then no one else will.

Speaker Paul Ryan:

The same is true when we think about complex and growing challenges to the security of our country. It's more than just a matter of sustaining military intelligence capabilities, in which we can never afford to be second best. That's the most basic of our responsibilities. We are in an all-inclusive competition against authoritarian regimes that want to supplant American influence wherever they can. They'll take any opening, exploit every weakness, and they're not much constrained by our standards of honor and fair play. We cannot take our special place in the world for granted. Our alliances, our friendships, the whole community of values among free nations, together these express the noblest aspirations of humanity, and they always need careful tending.

Speaker Paul Ryan:

American leadership has made the difference for 75 years and that means it is crucial, but not inevitable. If our influence ever faded by choices or miscalculations of our own, it would become a lot easier to picture the world as repressive surveillance states like China, see it already. A future in which pervasive state control over the individual is the model to follow and instead of the natural rights of men and women and a future of freedom.

Speaker Paul Ryan:

How many times did we hear the namesake of this library remind us that America isn't just a place on the map, defined by blood and soil. It's an idea. America is humanity's best attempt at upholding the truth that everyone is created equal, that the condition of your birth need not dictate the whole course of your life. And that word, created, that's still the key to it all because it reflects the true wisdom of our founding. You can listen to any peddler of the latest collectivist doctrine or any propaganda from some big brother regime, but you will never hear a creed more revolutionary than the American idea that the rights of every person are endowed by God, not granted by government. That creed has always been the best thing we have going for us as a country. It has universal appeal that no ideology centered on the power of the state can ever match.

Speaker Paul Ryan:

The test, as always, is to keep faith with our most basic ideals. And today we are challenged from within and from without. If we fail this test, it will be because the progressive left will have won by default. It will be because the conservative cause, which has been the protector of our great American creed, lost its way and followed the left into the trap of identity politics, defining itself by resentment instead of by ideals. It will be because we mistake reactionary skirmishes in the culture wars with a coherent agenda. It will be because we gave too much allegiance to one passing political figure and weren't loyal enough to our principles.

Speaker Paul Ryan:

I know my party well enough to believe that that is not our destiny. As long as America stays confident in the ideals of our founding, our country will forever stand as the alternative to tyranny of every kind. And even after the setbacks of 2020, it will be up to the conservative movement as it always is to serve those ideals with conviction, heart, and respect for the American people. Americans, as our 40th president said, our hopeful, big-hearted, idealistic, daring, decent and fair, those words describe the man himself. And they remind us of the generous spirit that overcomes setbacks and achieves great things. With that example, with the best that is in us, and by speaking to the best in our country, let's press on with the conservative cause and return that cause to a governing majority.

Speaker Paul Ryan:

Thank you very, very much.