

Richard Viguerie: The Trump Administration Is Already More Conservative Than Reagan's

As Donald Trump's transition unfolds three things have become clear; first, Trump is serious about making a break with the establishment conventional wisdom in DC.; second, Trump is serious about erasing the disastrous Obama-Clinton worldview from our government; third and finally, Trump has put conservatives largely in charge of his administration and charged them with carrying out those goals.

In fact, in my 55 years of involvement in the conservative movement at the national level, there's never been a time when conservatives occupied more positions of influence and power than they do today—and that includes the election of Ronald Reagan and during the Reagan transition.

Consider that the two previous presidential candidates of the modern conservative movement, Senator Barry Goldwater and Governor Ronald Reagan, didn't have actual conservatives running their campaigns.

Although Senator Goldwater's grassroots effort was powered by conservatives, the national campaign was run by his so-called "Arizona Mafia," Goldwater's trusted home-state political team.

The Arizona Mafia regularly fought the idea of running the campaign on conservative issues, even to the point of opposing one of the highlights of the campaign—then-actor Ronald Reagan's nationally televised "A Time for Choosing" appeal on Goldwater's behalf.

Sixteen years later, as conservatives celebrated Ronald Reagan's victory, the Republican establishment quietly stole the victory conservatives fought so hard to achieve.

With George H.W. Bush as vice president and James A. Baker III as White House chief of staff, the Reagan administration and White House quickly filled up with big-government establishment Republicans:

- Wall Street insider Donald T. Regan was appointed secretary of the treasury,
- Ford administration alumni Gen. Alexander Haig became secretary of state,
- Prominent corporate lawyer William French Smith became attorney general,
- Illinois Ag Commissioner John Block was appointed secretary of agriculture,
- Liberal Republican Senator Richard S. Schweiker was appointed secretary of health and human services,
- Establishment Republican Drew Lewis became secretary of transportation,
- Rockefeller Republican Samuel R. Pierce was secretary of housing and urban development,
- Establishment Republican politician James B. Edwards was secretary of energy,
- Longtime Republican education administrator Terrel H. Bell ran the Department of Education that Reagan had vowed to eliminate.

Of course, conservatives weren't entirely shut out of the early Reagan administration. We had great committed conservatives like Casper Weinberger at Defense, Jim Watt at Interior, and Edwin Meese III, Richard Allen, Judge William Clark and Marty Anderson in other key positions. And we had some good conservatives in subcabinet positions, such as Don Devine at OPM, Gerald P. Carmen at GSA, Gary Bauer at Education, Frank Gaffney at the Pentagon, Doug Bandow as a special assistant to the president, Becky Norton Dunlap at

Presidential Personnel and T. Kenneth Cribb Jr. as assistant to the president for domestic affairs, among contrast that record to where we stand today with Donald Trump as president-elect.

Trump's campaign evolved into a potent coalition of conservatives and populists, run by movement conservatives Kellyanne Conway, Steve Bannon and David Bossie.

The campaign was framed by conservatives and run on conservative issues: reestablishing American sovereignty, winning the war Islam has declared on America, enforcing immigration laws, law and order, ending the war on religion, ending corruption and crony government, cutting taxes and waste, encouraging economic growth and rebuilding the military, to name but a few of the key issues in the campaign.

In the aftermath of the 2016 election, which establishment Republicans predicted would be a defeat of epic proportion, the Republican Party, particularly in the states, is the strongest it's been in 80 years.

Republicans now dominate state government, with control of 32 state legislatures (17 with veto-proof majorities) and 33 governors elected, the GOP controls 68 state legislative chambers, and Democrats control just 31.

And Trump has given conservatives key roles in his administration:

- The vice president-elect is Indiana movement conservative Governor Mike Pence,
- Limited government constitutional conservative icon Senator Jeff Sessions of Alabama will be nominated attorney general,
- EPA will be headed by conservative Oklahoma Attorney General Scott Pruitt,
- Conservative Rep. Mike Pompeo will head the Central Intelligence Agency,

- Business turnaround expert Wilbur Ross will head the Commerce Department,
- Iran nuclear deal critic retired four-star Marine general, James “Mad Dog” Mattis will head the Pentagon,
- Pro-life conservative doctor and Obamacare critic Rep. Tom Price will head Health and Human Services,
- Illegal immigration and war on drugs hawk General John Kelly will head the Department of Homeland Security,
- Cultural conservative Dr. Ben Carson will head the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

What’s more, key Cabinet appointees who seem to have more establishment Republican backgrounds, such as Department of Education Secretary designate Betsy DeVos and Labor Secretary designate Andrew Puzder, have publicly embraced Trump’s conservative populist agenda.

DeVos, who had seemed to back Common Core in the past, appeared on stage at Trump’s Michigan Thank You Rally to say making education great again means “finally putting an end to the federal Common Core.”

And Puzder, a successful fast-food entrepreneur who had previously seemed to support more foreign workers entering the American workforce said, “My job as the Secretary of Labor, if confirmed, is to serve U.S. citizen workers—that is my moral and constitutional duty. The public spoke loud and clear in this election, and delivered a mandate to protect American workers. It makes no economic sense to spend trillions on welfare and jobless benefits for out of work Americans while bringing in foreign workers to fill jobs in their place ... As Secretary of Labor, I will fiercely defend American workers and implement my piece of the ten-point plan the President-elect laid out.”

And unlike the situation after Reagan was elected, conservative superstar Steve Bannon has been brought into the White House as Chief Strategist to hold the conservative

populist coalition together by making sure the administration delivers on Trump's campaign promises.

Not long after Ronald Reagan was elected, Lou Cannon of *The Washington Post* interviewed an anonymous "senior Reagan transition official." When Cannon asked him what conservatives and the Religious Right, who had been so instrumental in Reagan's election, would get out of the new administration this senior official said, "We're going to give 'em symbolism."

And in many, but not all, areas, that's what conservatives, especially cultural conservatives, got.

As great as Ronald Reagan was, today is better for conservatives. While Trump won't bat a thousand any more than Reagan did, conservatives are in positions of real power in this administration, and it appears we can count on getting much more than symbolism out of Donald Trump. {eo}

Richard Viguerie transformed American politics in the 1960s and '70s by pioneering the use of direct-mail fundraising in the political and ideological spheres. He used computerized direct-mail fundraising to help build the conservative movement, which then elected Ronald Reagan as the first conservative president of the modern era. As the "Funding Father of the conservative movement," Viguerie motivated millions of Americans to participate in politics for the first time, greatly expanding the base of active citizenship. He is our era's equivalent of Tom Paine, using a direct-mail letter rather than a pamphlet to deliver his call to arms.

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