

The Eve of the American Reawakening

Rep. Tom McClintock gave the following speech to the Council for National Policy in Washington D.C. on May 16, 2009.

Here, in the winter of our despair, I want to pause to take stock of the state of our nation on this date of May 16.

Voters have swept our party from office after a failed Republican administration that abandoned conservative principles. The most left-wing President in our nation's history has taken office with a 66 percent approval rating and strong majorities in both houses. His agenda includes radical intervention into energy markets, highly inflationary monetary policy, a determination to dramatically reduce our military spending while dramatically increasing overall domestic spending with deficits as far as the eye can see.

That was the state of our nation on May 16 ... 1977.

You remember those years. Jimmy Carter's policies brought us double-digit unemployment and double-digit inflation; interest rates at 21 percent, mile-long lines around gas stations, embassies seized with impunity and a military so weak it couldn't even project a simple rescue mission.

But then, just a few years later, it was morning again in America. Four years of Jimmy Carter produced eight years of Ronald Reagan, and looking back on it, that wasn't such a bad trade, was it?

Abraham Lincoln once said that if the voters get their backsides too close to the fire, they'll just have to sit on the blisters for a while.

The American people have some very painful blisters to sit on

for the next four years, but the good news is that they're already starting to figure that out.

On Inauguration Day, the Rasmussen poll gave the President a net approval rating of 28 points. Yesterday, that figure was seven points. During the fall campaign, Rasmussen reported that the generic Democratic candidate for Congress had a 16-point advantage over the generic Republican candidate. As of May 10, Rasmussen reports the generic Republican now has a one-point advantage over the Democrat.

Although the President's personal popularity remains high, most polls are showing a decidedly increasing skepticism over his policies. For example, yesterday Rasmussen reported that by a margin of 57 to 19 percent, Americans say that tax increases will hurt the economy.

What we are seeing in the polls is the gradual awakening of the American people. When things are going reasonably well – or even reasonably poorly – most people don't pay a lot of attention to politics because there are too many other pressing things going on in their lives. But when a crisis approaches, that's when you see the strength of a Democracy emerge, and it is an awesome thing. One by one, individual citizens sense the approach of a common danger and rise to the occasion. They begin focusing a great deal of attention on politics and they start making very good decisions.

We saw that two summers ago, when the McCain-Kennedy amnesty bill was set to glide through both houses of Congress on broad bi-partisan majorities. But the American people had finally had enough of being told there was nothing the government cared to do to defend the integrity of our borders and the sovereignty of our nation. And McCain-Kennedy didn't even make it to a final vote.

We saw that last summer, when gasoline prices hit \$4 a gallon and the American people had finally had enough of being told

there was nothing the government cared to do to get out of the way of domestic oil production. And in the span of just a few months, they turned 180 degrees on the issue of offshore oil drilling and nuclear power.

We saw that just a month ago, when Rick Santelli told a routine cable broadcast that he was sick and tired of being forced to pay his neighbor's mortgage – and the whole trading floor erupted in applause. He suggested that Americans need to rekindle the spirit that produced the Boston Tea Party, and suddenly, from every corner of America over 800 taxpayer protests erupted across the country on April 15. These protests weren't sponsored by parties or politicians. They were a grassroots uprising by a silent majority that will not remain silent any longer.

And yet I read the other day of a new chorus of hand-wringing that said we had to get over our nostalgia for Reagan, that we had to be mindful and respectful of the fact the "other side has something," and that we have nothing, and that "you can't beat something with nothing.

It's the same kind of hand-wringing that Ulysses S. Grant confronted at the Battle of the Wilderness among generals overawed by Robert E. Lee's aggressiveness, audacity and success. Grant, turned to his distraught generals, and said "Bobby Lee this, and Bobby Lee that! You'd think he's going to do double somersaults and outflank us on both sides and the rear. Stop thinking about what Bobby Lee's going to do to us, and start thinking about what we're going to do to Bobby Lee. Now get some guns up here."

To those who say we should put the Reagan era behind us – I have a better idea. Let's put the Bush era behind us.

To those who say we should redefine our principles, I have a better idea: we don't need to redefine our principles; we need to return to them.

To those of the Republican establishment, who misled our party for years, who dismantled so much of what Ronald Reagan accomplished and now tell us “the other side has something” and we have nothing. To them I can’t improve upon Cromwell’s words: “You have sat here too long for any good you have been doing; it is not fit that you should sit here any longer. You shall now give way to better men. Now depart and let us have done with you, I say, in the name of God, GO!”

“The other side has something and we have nothing?”

What is the something the other side has – that some say we have to be respectful and mindful of?

Statism. Shortage. Paternalism. That’s their “something” that seems to so overawe and over-impress these scions of a failed party establishment.

Statism, shortage and paternalism is what we are told to be mindful and respectful of? I don’t think so.

Their statism is “something” so extreme that the entire national debt accumulated from the first day of the George Washington administration to the very last day of the George W. Bush administration will literally double in the next five years and triple in the next ten.

The tax increases already proposed to support it will rob every family of more than \$2,500 from its purchasing power every year. We’re supposed to respect that? The American people don’t respect it. The American people know that you cannot spend your way rich; that you cannot borrow your way out of debt and you cannot tax your way to prosperity. And they know that if you live well beyond your means today, you must of necessity live well BELOW your means in the future. And that’s not a future we want for our children.

Their entire policy is predicated on maintaining shortages of everything from health care to energy and then using the force

of government to ration that shortage according to their own whims. The “something” that they propose to solve their government-induced shortages is having bureaucrats tell us what medical treatments our kids may have and when they may have them; raising energy prices until we bicycle to work; telling us what kind of light bulbs to use, where to set our thermostats, when to use our appliances.

And then there’s Paternalism. That’s what Rick Santelli was talking about. When your neighbor buys the house he can’t afford – it’s now your job to pay his mortgage. When the fraternity brothers of Paulson and Geitner party their investments into the ground – now it’s your job to cover their losses. When the reckless country-clubbers of General Motors and Chrysler give away the farm to the UAW – now it’s your job to make up the difference, and by the way, now it’s Barney Frank’s job to tell you what kind of car you may buy.

That is the “something” that seems to send these self-described “New Republicans,” into paroxysms of awe and policy-envy.

That’s the “something” that some people are so deathly afraid of saying “NO” to. Churchill said, “Alexander the Great remarked that the people of Asia were slaves because they had not learned to pronounce the word “NO.” Let that not be the epitaph of the English-speaking peoples or of parliamentary democracy ... There, in one single word, is the resolve which the forces of freedom and progress, of tolerance and goodwill, should take.”

What is the “nothing” that we have that so dismays and disgusts these same messiahs of mediocrity – this “nothing” that’s convinced them that we must wean ourselves from our unseemly nostalgia with such irrelevant has-beens as Reagan, and Lincoln and Jefferson – I add the others because they stood for exactly the same principles as Reagan.

We stand for freedom.

We stand for abundance.

We stand for individual responsibility.

Freedom. Abundance and Responsibility. That is our platform.

Those who call that “nothing” are the same failed leaders who disdained it during the Reagan years and dismantled it as soon as the Reagan years were over.

They stand for statism. We stand for freedom: The God-given right to enjoy the fruit of our own labor; the right to raise our children according to our own values; the right to express our opinions and our faith freely and without reserve; the right to defend ourselves and our families; the right to enter into voluntary associations with each other for our mutual betterment without an army of busy-bodies telling us what is best for us.

They stand for the rationing of shortage. We stand for abundance: what happens when free men and free women enjoy the liberty to go as far as their desire, talent and imagination can guide them and as far as their labor, industry and enterprise can take them. Societies prosper when freedom protects the rights of each of us to decide on our own what we will produce and what we will consume. Government exists to protect the conditions that produce abundance, not to ration shortages that government has caused.

They stand for paternalism. We stand for personal responsibility. That means you stand by your promises. That means you tell your customers the truth about your products and investments. It means if you bring a child into the world then by God you look after that child. And it means if you make a bad decision, you set it right and you learn from it – and you realize that the bad decisions we all make from time to time is the price we pay for the freedom to make all the good decisions in our lives.

Freedom. Abundance. Responsibility. Ladies and Gentlemen, that ain't "nothing." That's everything.

That's everything our country is, everything our country stands for. That's everything ten generations of Americans have fought to defend. That is everything that the happiness and prosperity of society depends upon. That is everything that we have – everything that we are – everything that we hope as Americans.

Jefferson called it the "sum of good government" which he described as "a wise and frugal Government, which shall restrain men from injuring one another, shall leave them otherwise free to regulate their own pursuits of industry and improvement, and shall not take from the mouth of labor the bread it has earned."

At the risk of politically incorrect nostalgia, nine years before he became Governor of California, Reagan put it this way during a commencement address to his alma mater. He said, "This is a simple struggle between those of us who believe that man has the dignity and sacred right and the ability to choose and shape his own destiny and those who do not so believe. This irreconcilable conflict is between those who believe in the sanctity of individual freedom and those who believe in the supremacy of the state."

Lincoln said much the same. He said, "That is the real issue. That is the issue that will continue in this country when these poor tongues of Judge Douglas and myself shall be silent. It is the eternal struggle between these two principles – right and wrong – throughout the world. They are the two principles that have stood face to face from the beginning of time; and will ever continue to struggle. The one is the common right of humanity, and the other is the divine right of kings. It is the same principle in whatever shape it develops itself. It is the same spirit that says, 'You work and toil and earn bread, and I'll eat it.' No

matter in what shape it comes, whether from the mouth of a king who seeks to bestride the people of his own nation and live by the fruit of their labor, or from one race of men as an apology for enslaving another race, it is the same tyrannical principle."

And today, our country faces this tyrannical principle in actual practice.

The Left would condemn our children to the failure of government schools run by teacher unions. We would liberate parents to select the school and the teacher that best meets their child's needs and hold the school and the teacher accountable for the results.

The Left would condemn our families to sky-high energy prices; we would free America's vast energy reserves and limitless supplies of clean, cheap electricity through nuclear power, hydro-electricity and clean coal.

The Left would condemn our health care to bureaucrats who'll decide what treatments we may have and when we may have them. We would provide the tax credits to bring a basic health plan within the financial reach of every family – a health plan they could chose, they could own, and they could change if it failed to serve them.

The Left would deny union members the right to a secret ballot; we would free employers to pay bonuses to union members above and beyond their union contract.

The Left would plunder our children of their prosperity tomorrow to pay for the unprecedented expansion of government today. We insist on a government that does what families do every day: work hard, waste not and live within our means. And that promise needs to begin with renouncing the failed Bush administration that violated every one of these tenets.

The Left offers stifling central planning to manage every

aspect of our lives; they offer higher and higher taxes and more and more costly regulations. We offer freedom.

It's ironic that the same rocket scientists who say we have to listen more to the opposition's message obviously haven't been listening to our own.

We have the most powerful message in the history of mankind. It is freedom. And to those who say we have no messengers – look around at each other. Yes, Ronald Reagan was a great communicator, but as William Saracino has said, “He wasn't communicating cookie recipes.” And if we learned anything at all from that great man, it was that every one of us needs to be a messenger.

In February of 1861, Abraham Lincoln's inaugural train paused in Indianapolis and he spoke these words: “Of the people when they rise in mass on behalf of the Union and the liberties of their country, it may be said ‘The gates of hell shall not prevail against them. I appeal to you constantly to bear in mind that not with the President, not with the office-seekers, but with you is the question, ‘Shall the liberties of this country be preserved to the latest generation.’”

That is our clarion call. Ladies and Gentlemen, what has happened to our nation has happened on our generation's watch, and it is our generation's responsibility to set things right.

Does anyone here have any doubt how this battle will end as long as we stand firm? I think the Left is starting to figure that out too, and behind the smarmy smirks of superiority, their real sentiments are showing through.

The Department of Homeland Security refuses to use the word “terrorist” to describe Al Qaeda. It has replaced the term “acts of terrorism” with the term “man-made disaster” so as not to offend Islamic extremists. But it doesn't hesitate to declare every American who believes in Constitutional principles or who defended those principles on far off

battlefields as “potential domestic terrorists.”

That offers real insight into the Left. Churchill put it this way: “They are afraid of words and thoughts. Words spoken abroad, thoughts stirring at home – all the more powerful because forbidden – terrify them. A little mouse – a little tiny mouse – of thought enters the room and these mighty potentates are thrown into panic. They make frantic efforts to bar out thoughts and words; they are afraid of the workings of the human mind.”

Think about what terrifies the Left. Letters to the editor. Calls to talk shows. Blogs on the internet. Comments after newspaper editorials. Taxpayer tea parties.

Why did they react so viscerally to the tea parties? You remember the tale of the “Emperor’s New Clothes” – once the townspeople realized that there were many others who believed as they believed, the façade collapsed.

So let’s not disappoint our friends on the left. Let us all here today resolve that we’re going to spend at least ten hours a week agitating and educating in every forum we can find.

When the American Founders adopted the Declaration of Independence, they pledged to each other their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor. They were speaking quite literally. When they pledged their lives, they meant it. The King had already warned that a noose awaited every one of them. When they pledged their fortunes, they meant it. Lewis Morris had just received word that his estate in New York had been burned to the ground, that his family had become refugees and that his two sons had enlisted in the rag-tag army around General Washington.

How little history demands of our generation in defense of those same principles. We aren’t asked to pledge our entire fortunes – just a small portion of our earnings in support of

the causes and candidates we believe in. We aren't asked to pledge our lives – only a small portion of our lives until we have set things right.

But our sacred honor – that history demands of us in full. That we leave today highly resolved not to fail or falter until we have restored freedom as the cornerstone of our government. Because if we fail to do that, then what history will demand of our children and grandchildren is unthinkable.

So let us honor the memory of Reagan and Lincoln and Jefferson and all those placed freedom above security and principle above politics. To those among us who would do otherwise, as Shakespeare said, "He who hath no stomach for this fight, let him now depart."

And then let us together write the next chapter of the American Republic: that just when it appeared that the principles of American freedom were faltering, this generation rediscovered them, rallied to them, revived them, restored them, polished them and passed them on shining and inviolate to the many succeeding generations that followed.