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The Dark Side of Ronald Reagan

By Harry Braun

Now that the week long media coverage of President Ronald Reagan's funeral and presidency has ended, it is time to reflect on the dark side of his presidency, where "getting the government off of the backs of Americans" really meant eliminating the environmental regulations for energy, timber and mining corporations, so they could then rape, rob and ruin the natural environment and poison our own people for their short-term profits. The notorious James Watt, Reagan's infamous Interior Secretary who was a former industry lobbyist, was at war with those who sought to protect the remaining wilderness areas. Watt was not mentioned as part of the Reagan legacy. He should have been because America has been paying the price ever since.

Getting the government off the backs of Americans really meant removing the regulations and oversight of corporate executives and their accountants, which resulted in literally trillions of dollars being stolen from small investors in a corporate crime wave that began in the Reagan administration, and has continued to this day. Such "free market" policies have also been directly responsible for the deindustrialization of America, where millions of high-quality manufacturing and professional jobs have been outsourced by multinational corporations to foreign countries, which practice slave labor and contaminate the environment with their destructive business practices.

Corporate Reality

Corporations are mindless money machines that must be carefully regulated. They have no loyalty to the American people or even their shareholders. They are not human, yet their raw financial power allows them to hire an army of lobbyists who directly influence the legislative process in the U.S. and other countries. The principal beneficiaries of corporate wealth are typically the CEO's and their management teams, who conduct their affairs in secret and effectively determine who should serve on the Board of Directors.

In order to accomplish their financial objectives, corporations have not hesitated to make highly toxic substances, including mercury that ends up in the brains of our children, or radioactive wastes that will be causing disease and death for millions of generations into the future. If the long-term problems caused from a corporation's short-term profit concerns becomes unmanageable, the corporation simply goes out of existence, but the problems do not go away. It is why private corporations should never be allowed to determine environmental regulations or deal with the production, transport or storage of toxic substances without strict federal oversight.

As it is now, federal and state governments are lobbied to allow corporations to contaminate and exploit our own people. Agribusiness corporations run concentration camps for animals, which provide low-quality drug-laced food to consumers; and health care corporations run inhumane concentration camps for seniors -- all because corporate accountants have determined that it is more profitable to operate that way. Given these realities, the Reagan and Bush administration's policies of simply "trusting" corporations to do the right thing are policies of stupidity. It is unfortunate that individuals with such a limited understanding of reality can be elected to be President of the United States.

Corporate & Balanced Budget Amendments to the Constitution

If I am elected president, I will seek to pass strict new oversight laws that will not trust private corporations or business interests to do the right thing or to act in the public interest. The only thing my administration will trust is that corporations will act in their own self-interest. One of the most basic aspects of human nature is that where interest lies, honor dies. To assume otherwise is to ignore the lessons of history, and those who do not learn the lessons are forced to repeat them. But in the case of *Spaceship Earth*, such ignorance will allow the oblivion scenario to eliminate the possibility of a nanotechnology future, which is a lot to lose. It is why the next election is like no other in history.

Given that a large number of multinational corporations are now financially larger than many countries, it is important not to allow their financial power and lobbyists to influence legislation because it fundamentally undermines the democratic process. This is why a Constitutional Amendment is required to ban all corporate and business lobbying and contributions that are provided to elected officials. This Corporate Amendment will also substantially strengthen corporate oversight by federal officials, it make corporate secrecy illegal, and it will strictly prohibit any corporate dominance and/or influence in the print and electronic news media.

Although Reagan and Bush claimed to be fiscal conservatives, they both tripled the national debt with their reckless foreign and military policies that wasted hundreds of billions of taxpayers dollars. It is why a Constitutional Amendment to balance the federal budget is also necessary.

Reagan's Reckless Rhetoric

While newscasters admired Reagan's references to the Soviet Union as the "evil empire," such language was clearly reckless given that a nuclear war with the Soviet Union would have had a utterly devastating impact on America. It was just as reckless for President Bush to refer to South Korea's leader, Kim Jong Ill as a "pigmy" who he loathed. Such name calling is childish and derails meaningful negotiations, and it is part of the reasons why the vast majority of the people in the world, including our closest allies, disliked the Reagan administration almost as much as they now dislike the Bush administration.

President Reagan was well intentioned, but he, like President Bush, was technically illiterate. This explains why his administration spent billions on a needless arms race with unrealistic Star Wars technologies, while he cut the relatively modest budgets from some of the most promising renewable energy technologies, such as the Ocean Thermal Energy Conversion (OTEC) systems that were being developed by Lockheed, Grumman and TRW, and could have made the U.S. energy independent of all fossil and nuclear fuels by 1990.

While many people give credit to Reagan for ending the Cold War, such statements are pure political rhetoric with no basis in reality. The collapse of the Soviet Union would have occurred regardless of who was president of the United States, because the fundamental reasons for the collapse were due to the internal corruption and secrecy of its government, not external pressure from the west. As Kevin Martin, executive director of the disarmament group called Peace Action stated in a June 21, 2004 interview in Time magazine, Reagan actually prolonged the Cold War by strengthening the old-line hawks in the Soviet Union through his strident attacks on communism.

Reagan was opposed to women's rights, unions, and civil rights. He was the first president since Eisenhower to oppose the Equal Rights Amendment, and he was an outspoken advocate of states' rights during his 1980 presidential campaign. In his first term, he cut the budget of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights; he appointed anti-affirmative-action commissioners; and vetoed the Congressional sanctions against the apartheid in South Africa. These are hardly reasons to treat Reagan as a figure to be worshiped.

While many pundits referred to Reagan as a "deep thinker," he was obviously disengaged from many of the details of his policies, including the Iran Contra scandal that resulted in the mass-murder of thousands of innocent people in Central America. Reagan himself joked about the fact that his working days at the White House were carefree, where he started late, took afternoon naps, and left early. This is certainly understandable given his age, but to suggest that he was some towering intellect with a powerful vision for the future of America is simply political propaganda. It is as if the national news networks work for the Republican National Committee.

On The Bright Side

Ronald Reagan was surely a great American who accomplished much in his life, and surely sought to do the right thing. His policies, however, have had a devastatingly negative impact on our country as well as the biological life-support systems of *Spaceship Earth*, and to suggest otherwise ignores reality and allows such destructive policies to be continued. Neither President Reagan, President Bush -- or Senator Kerry for that matter -- acknowledge or discuss the exponential nature of the global energy and environmental problems, which means we are all like passengers on the *Titanic* and there is only a limited amount of time to "change course." Indeed, given the Exponential Age in which we live, we are as close to a nanotechnology utopia as we are to an ecological oblivion, which is why the decisions we make in the next election may well determine which future evolves.

Just as Caesar found Rome a city of clay and left it a city of marble, we have found our civilization addicted to a fossil fuel and nuclear economy that is highly polluting and rapidly diminishing, and we have the opportunity to replace it with a solar hydrogen economy that will provide "sustainable prosperity without pollution." It is not a question of technology, but of political priorities. Most importantly, however, it is a question of "changing course" while there is still time to make a difference.

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