

Ronald Reagan on economics and political parties, 1962

Introduction

In May 1962, Ronald Reagan wrote this letter expressing his ideas about economic policy and the nation's political parties. Reagan wrote as a supporter of the conservative Republican Senator Barry Goldwater. Reagan had spent much of his political career campaigning and voting for Democrats, but throughout the 1950s his increasingly conservative views turned him toward the Republican Party. In this letter, he writes, "I myself have been a life long Dem. but no longer." Reagan had only recently switched parties—he refrained from officially becoming a Republican until after the 1960 presidential election so that he could campaign as a "Democrat for Nixon." Reagan believed that the Democratic Party had become too liberal, especially concerning economic issues. Here, he writes of "turning to the Rep. party" and making it "the organ for Economic conservatism."

Questions for Discussion

Read the document introduction and the transcript, and view the actual letter. Then apply your knowledge of American history in order to answer the questions that follow.

1. Describe the specific suggestions to support legislation that Reagan mentioned in his letter.
2. Research and identify Senator Barry Goldwater. Why would Ronald Reagan support Goldwater in 1960?
3. Explain Reagan's opinions regarding a third political party.

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RONALD REAGAN

May 26

Dear Mr. Ward

Thanks very much for your kind letter. You ask if there is anything more to be done than writing to Cong. & Senators. At the moment with regard to the Harlow-Baker bill (H.R. 3000-3001) this writing is very important. Sen. Barry Goldwater says "only a flood of mail" will get this bill out of committee.

We should write the "House Ways & Means Committee" urging them to put the bill before Congress. We should also write our Rep. & Senators. Most important we should urge all our friends to do the same and if we belong to organizations get them to pass resolutions endorsing the bill and send these resolutions to Wash.

As for a 3rd party I think we could save effort by turning to the Rep. party (I myself have been a life long Dem. but no longer) and by our very members force that party to be the organ for Economic conservatism.

The Gilder Lehrman Collection
Ronald Reagan

Ronald Reagan to Harold Ward, May 26, 1962. (Gilder Lehrman Collection, GLC00782.17)

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Transcript

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[*draft*]

Ronal Reagan

May 26

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As for a 3rd party I think we could save effort by turning to the Rep. party (I myself have been a life long Dem. but no longer) and by our very numbers force that party to be the organ for Economic conservatism.

Again thanks –

Sincerely

Ronald Reagan

[*envelope*]

Mr. Harold Ward

8 Paddock Lane

Great Neck N.Y.

Notes: Printed text is underlined. Reagan was then working actively for the election of Richard Nixon.