

This Day in History... February 6, 1911

Birth of Ronald Reagan

Ronald Wilson Reagan was born in Tampico, Illinois, on February 6, 1911.

Even as a young man, Reagan showed an interest in acting and politics. He appeared in several school plays throughout his high school career and was elected president of the student council. In 1928, "Dutch," as he was known, entered Eureka College, majoring in economics and sociology. While attending Eureka, Reagan participated in different sports, played the lead role in several school productions, and served as the president of the student body.

In 1932, Reagan graduated from college and became a sportscaster at a local radio station in Des Moines, Iowa. Five years later, while covering baseball spring training in California, Reagan made a screen test for Warner Brothers. Between 1937 and 1964, Reagan appeared in over 50 motion pictures. He served six terms as president of the

Screen Actors Guild, a union that represents actors and actresses. Because of his poor eyesight, Reagan couldn't serve overseas during World War II, but helped produce over 400 Army Air Force training films.

Reagan first entered politics as a Democrat, campaigning for Harry Truman in 1948. However, during the 1950s, Reagan gradually adopted more conservative views, campaigning for Republican candidates Dwight Eisenhower and Richard Nixon. In 1962, Reagan officially joined the Republican Party.

In 1966, Reagan was elected to the first of three terms as governor of California. While in office, Reagan worked hard to reduce the size and cost of government. Although he was responsible for major policy decisions, Governor Reagan surrounded himself with capable people and relied on them to work out the details of his legislative program.

Reagan's first bid for the presidency came in 1968. However, he failed to win the nomination. In 1976 he ran again, this time losing the nomination by a small margin to Gerald Ford. Encouraged by the small margin of defeat, Reagan began preparing for the 1980 nomination almost immediately. This time he won the Republican nomination on the first ballot, as well as the election itself.

During the election campaign, Reagan detailed his plan to lower inflation. He vowed to cut federal income taxes by as much as 30%, reduce government regulation of business, increase military spending, and cut funding for several other federal programs. This plan to balance the budget and lower inflation came to be known as "Reaganomics." Though the economy recovered, the national debt nearly tripled over the course of his presidency, the largest percentage increase during any presidency outside of the First and Second World Wars.

On March 31, 1981, President Reagan narrowly escaped death after being shot in the chest by John W. Hinckley Jr. The assassination attempt occurred as Reagan was leaving a Washington, DC, hotel. Although Reagan was 70 years old, he recovered quickly from his wound.

In November 1986, news broke that Iran was given US weapons in return for the release of the US hostages. The next day it was reported that Reagan approved the deal. The scandal widened, as it was revealed that some of the proceeds from the arms sales had been diverted to the Nicaraguan Contras. On December 30, 1986, the president admitted "mistakes were made," but insisted he did not know arms sales were diverted to Nicaragua. Later, special investigations officially blamed the president for the operation.

As the Republicans gathered for their National Convention on August 18, 1988, Vice President George Bush secured the nomination. With Reagan's endorsement, Bush won a sweeping victory in the election. Reagan left office with a high approval rating and planned to have an active post-presidency. However, he revealed in 1994 that he had Alzheimer's and made his last public appearance at Richard Nixon's funeral. He died 10 years later in 2004 and is often considered an icon of the Republican Party.



Stamp issued a year after Reagan's death.



This stamp was issued to meet the increased first-class mail rate.



Stamp issued to mark Reagan's 100th birthday.



Issued on Nancy Reagan's 101st birthday.

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