

President	Ronald W. Reagan
Chronological Order	40
Life Span	1911-1989
Home State	California
Elected	1980, 1984
Political Party	Republican
Vice President	George H. W. Bush
First Lady	Nancy Davis Reagan
Children	2 sons, 2 daughters
Physical Attributes	6' 1" tall, brown hair, blue eyes
Undergraduate Education	Eureka College (Economics)
Military Service	U.S. Army Airforce, Motion Picture Unit, World War II
Profession	Actor
Other Political Offices	Governor
Nickname	The Gipper
Family Lineage:	Irish, Scottish, English
Religious Affiliation	Disciples of Christ, Presbyterian



- Biographical Notes
1. Reagan was an important president because he changed the structure of the Republican Party during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. In the mid-twentieth century, the GOP had two distinct wings: the East Coast (or moderate) wing and the Old Guard (or conservative) wing. From 1944 to 1980, moderates led the party: Dewey, Eisenhower, Nixon, Ford, and Rockefeller. Reagan's landslide victories in 1980 and 1984 caused the party to shift significantly to the right, so much so that in 2020 conservatives dominate the Republican Party.
 2. Reagan was somewhat paradoxical. He was first an FDR Democrat, then became a conservative Republican at the age of 51. As an avowed conservative Republican, he advocated fiscal restraint, tax reduction, and small government; yet as president, he increased military spending to unprecedented levels and ran up record budget deficits. He was ideological in his rhetoric (he once called the Soviet Union an "evil empire"), yet often chose to act pragmatically (he developed a remarkable personal relationship with Soviet premier Mikhail Gorbachev). He was famously gregarious and charming, but also emotionally remote and hard to get to know.
 3. Reagan took office when the nation faced economic stagnation and inflation at home and frustration abroad. In response, he repeatedly proclaimed the greatness of the American way of life, often invoking Lincoln's poignant description of the U.S. as "the last best hope of earth." By the time he left office, the country was reasonably prosperous, and the U.S.S.R. was in decline. Thanks in part to Reagan, a tireless cheerleader for democratic values, the American people found renewed faith in their national institutions. This was his major accomplishment as president.
On the other hand, his coupling of the largest tax cut in American history with huge increases in military spending created massive budget deficits. (During Reagan's term in office, the national debt rose from \$994 billion to \$2.87 trillion.) At the same time, careless deregulation of the savings and loan industry saddled the government with an enormous cleanup estimated at \$500 billion. These actions set dangerous precedents – the next conservative Republican president, George W. Bush, made the same mistakes. Bush's errors had a devastating effect on the American economy circa 2008.
 4. Reagan's father, Jack, was a gregarious man with a grade school education who was a salesman, usually of

shoes. He was also an alcoholic. Reagan said later, "We didn't live on the wrong side of the tracks, but we lived so close to them we could hear the whistle real loud."

Reagan's mother, Nelle, attended the Disciples of Christ church and was deeply religious. She taught him to read at an early age. Nelle loved the theater and encouraged Ronald to act.

5. Reagan attended tiny Eureka College (250 students) in Peoria, IL. The school had been founded by the Disciples of Christ in 1855, and the church provided most of the college's endowment during Reagan's stay there. He majored in economics but was an indifferent student, graduating with a C average in 1932. At Eureka, he played football, was a member of the college swim team, performed with the drama club, and served as president of the student council.

6. From 1932 to 1937, Reagan was a sports broadcaster for a radio station in Iowa. He covered University of Iowa football games and Chicago Cubs baseball games. He did not attend the Cubs games. He "reconstructed" them from a pitch-by-pitch account he received by telegraph.

From 1937 to 1957, he was a Hollywood movie actor, appearing in 52 films. Reagan was a good actor but did not display the emotional range to make him a star. He did his best work in light comedies and action movies. His most famous role was that of George Gipp, a talented but rakish Notre Dame football player who was terminally ill. On his deathbed, Gipp tells the coach, "Someday, when the team is up against it, and the breaks are beating the boys, ask them to go in there with all they've got and win just one for the Gipper." Reagan often used this story to rally his political followers, and reporters gave him the nickname "The Gipper."

7. In 1947, Reagan was elected president of the Screen Actors Guild (SAG), the major labor union in his industry. He served six one-year terms. Reagan testified before the House Committee on Un-American Activities during its investigation of Communists in Hollywood in the spring of 1947. When asked whether there were Communists in SAG, he replied that a small clique "has been suspected of more or less following the tactics that we associate with the Communist Party," but he did not name any names. He then added that he thought Hollywood could police any communists in its midst.

Reagan also served as a confidential informant for the FBI during their investigation of Communists in Hollywood. He told them that most SAG members were loyal and true Americans, but a small faction always seemed to "follow the Communist Party line." Reagan gave the names of several of the offenders, including Anne Revere, the SAG treasurer and an Academy Award winner.

8. FDR's Works Progress Administration employed Reagan's father and brother during the Depression. He was grateful for this and was a strong supporter of both FDR (he voted for Roosevelt four times) and Truman. Also, he admired the way that FDR was able to inspire the American people.

Reagan's politics changed in the 1950s. He was a participant in the Democrats-for-Eisenhower campaigns in 1952 and 1956. But in 1960, when many "Eisenhower Democrats" returned to the party fold, Reagan supported Nixon, not Kennedy. He did this because he distrusted Kennedy and the Democratic Party, which he saw as moving to the left. He gave over 200 speeches for Nixon and changed his registration to Republican in 1962.

9. From 1954 to 1962, Reagan narrated a television show, *General Electric Theatre*, which dominated its Sunday evening time slot. As part of his contract, Reagan was required to make several trips each year to GE plants, where he spoke to workers and executives. These speeches allowed him to hone his speaking message and technique, and as time went on, they became more and more political.

10. Reagan's political conversion was motivated, in part, by his change in economic status. In 1945, his agent secured a \$1 million multiyear contract for him, worth more than \$11 million in today's dollars. At that time, the tax rates were the highest in U.S. history and individuals were not allowed to average their incomes. Reagan resented paying high taxes and began to feel that the government was infringing upon his freedom. Also, his GE speaking trips exposed him to company middle managers who shared his concern. These anti-government views crept into his GE speeches, which at the beginning had combined patriotic themes with stories of Hollywood. Over time, his speech evolved into a generalized message about freedom. Reagan, who in the 1940s criticized "Big Business" now attacked "Big Government" and sang the praises of American business. Reagan's conversion to Republicanism was also affected by his marriage in 1952 to Nancy Davis, whose stepfather was a physician with very conservative political views.

11. Reagan's eight years with GE served as a valuable political apprenticeship – he spoke at 135 plants to many of GE's 250,000 employees. He traveled by train because he disliked flying, and on the trips, he wrote

out his speeches in longhand on legal pads. In these speeches he carefully reworked his themes of individual freedom and anticommunism, surrounding his message with interesting stories from newspapers and magazines. The result was a basic address – known as "The Speech" – that expressed Reagan's core convictions.

12. Reagan entered politics with a nationally televised speech, "A Time for Choosing," supporting Barry Goldwater for president in 1964. In this speech, he called for leadership that would reduce the federal government's domestic reach while simultaneously bolstering its military establishment and resisting the worldwide spread of communism. The speech was a big hit with conservative Republicans. Later, Reagan wrote, "The speech raised \$8 million and soon changed my entire life."

The 1964 campaign also foreshadowed the Republican resurgence in the South, where whites backed Goldwater and later Reagan because both men opposed the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

13. Reagan was elected governor of California in 1966 and 1970. He was a successful governor and showed a surprising willingness to compromise with the Democratic legislature to get things done. He preferred partial victories to, as he put it, "going off the cliff with all flags flying."

As governor, Reagan was involved in several high-profile conflicts with the era's protest movements, including his public criticism of university administrators for tolerating student demonstrations at the University of California at Berkeley. On May 15, 1969, during the People's Park protest at the university campus, Reagan sent the California Highway Patrol and other law enforcement officers to quell the protests. This incident became known as "Bloody Thursday" and resulted in the death of student James Rector and the blinding of carpenter Alan Blanchard by shotgun blasts from law enforcement officers. Police officers were also injured in the conflict, including one who was knifed in the chest. Reagan then called out 2,200 state National Guard troops who occupied the city of Berkeley for two weeks to crack down on the protesters. One year after the incident, Reagan responded to questions about campus protest movements saying, "If it takes a bloodbath, let's get it over with. No more appeasement."

14. In August 1974, President Ford chose former New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller to be vice president. This enraged conservatives because, as they saw it, their liberal GOP nemesis (Rockefeller) was now a heartbeat away from the presidency and would have a head start over Reagan for the nomination if Ford was elected and served out his term. Consequently, Reagan challenged Ford for the 1976 Republican nomination. Reagan arrived at the Republican National Convention neck-and-neck with Ford, who eked out a 1,187 to 1,070 vote first ballot victory.

Reagan's constant sniping at Ford during the Republican primaries hurt the president's chances of being re-elected. Also, in the general election against Carter, Reagan was not helpful to Ford – he made only one appearance for him at a small gathering. On election night, several states were decided by one or two percent, and Ford felt that he might have won if he had had Reagan's full support.

15. When Ford gave his acceptance speech at the 1976 Republican National Convention, it was well-received, and Reagan and Nancy were listening from a skybox. Swept up in the feeling of triumph, Ford waved to Reagan and motioned to him to come down and join him onstage. His primacy established, Ford hoped the moment would demonstrate party unity. The crowd roared.

Reagan indicated a reluctance come down, but the crowd overwhelmingly wanted him to appear. People were yelling, "Speech, speech." Ford said over the public address system, "Ron, would you come down and bring Nancy?"

Reagan came down and gave an impromptu, six-minute speech that was better than Ford's prepared address. Reagan talked about the stakes for the convention and the country, asking Republicans to think of themselves as future generations would see them. He said, in part:

Will they look back with appreciation and say, 'Thank God for those people in 1976 who headed off our loss of freedom? Who kept us now a hundred years later free? Who kept our world from nuclear destruction?' ... This is our challenge and this is why here in this hall tonight, better than we've done before, we've got to quit talking to each other and about each other and go out and communicate to the world that we may be fewer in numbers than we've ever been, but we carry the message they're waiting for. We must go forth from here united, determined that what a great general said a few years ago is true: There is no substitute for victory.

The delegates were moved by his address. ABC News reporter Sam Donaldson said that this was "the first real emotion of the night," and it "wasn't for the ticket, but for the man who wasn't on it." One Ford

delegate exclaimed, "Oh my God, we've nominated the wrong man." Journalist Fred Barnes wrote, "In the time it took Reagan to speak, the Republican Party escaped the clutches of its moderate establishment and fell into Reagan's lap. He lost the nomination, but won the party."

16. In 1980, Reagan was the front runner for the Republican nomination for president, but George H. W. Bush also decided to run. In Iowa, Bush outworked Reagan and won the Iowa caucuses. During the campaign, he made Reagan's age an issue and raised concerns about Reagan's economic plans to lower taxes and increase military spending while balancing the federal budget. He called the proposal "voodoo economics."

Once the campaign turned to New Hampshire, Reagan and Bush became embroiled in an incident that has become part of the lore of American political history. The *Telegraph* newspaper in Nashua proposed a debate between just Reagan and Bush, and the Reagan campaign agreed to pay for it. The other presidential candidates complained about the exclusivity of the event, and on the afternoon of the debate, Reagan decided to open it up to all the candidates. Bush replied that he would abide by the previously set "rules" and would participate only in a one-on-one forum.

At the debate, there were chairs for only Bush, Reagan, and the moderator, and Bush got to his seat on the stage first. Reagan then stormed out from behind the curtain with the other candidates in tow and asked if he could make a statement. The moderator refused the request since it was not part of the agreed-upon rules. Reagan insisted that he be allowed to speak, and the moderator called for Reagan's microphone to be turned off. Reagan then bellowed what would be the catchphrase of the 1980 primary, "I am paying for this microphone, Mr. Green!" Cameras then caught Bush saying nothing and staring ahead like a deer caught in the headlights. Reagan went on to win New Hampshire and the GOP nomination for president.

17. Once Reagan had the nomination, he had to decide who his running mate would be. He felt that it should not be George Bush for three reasons. First, Bush had made the Californian's age an issue on the campaign trail. Second, Bush's "voodoo economics" tag continued to plague Reagan. Third, Bush did not support a constitutional amendment to ban abortion.

At the Republican National Convention, Reagan's political operatives felt that his running mate should be a moderate, not a hardcore conservative like Reagan. Discussions began with former president Gerald Ford, whereby Ford, as vice president, would have unprecedented powers, even veto power over who the members of the cabinet would be. But ultimately these plans fell through, and Reagan invited Bush to be his running mate. After accepting Reagan's offer, Bush was criticized by some for changing his previous views on issues such as abortion and the economy to become more consistent with Reagan's.

18. The Solid South is a term that refers to fourteen southern states (the eleven states formerly of the Confederate States of America, plus West Virginia, Kentucky, and Oklahoma) that voted overwhelmingly Democratic in the 1930s and 1940s. No Republican presidential candidate won any of these states in 1932, 1936, 1940, 1944, and 1948, and Republicans won only seventeen percent of the presidential elections in these states during the years 1932 to 1960.

This voting pattern changed dramatically after the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was passed by a Democratic Congress and signed into law by Lyndon Johnson. From 1968 to 2020, Democrats have won only nineteen percent of presidential elections in those fourteen states. This trend began in 1968 with George Wallace's third-party candidacy and Nixon's Southern Strategy. Both used "states' rights" and "law and order" as dog whistles for the racial biases of southern white voters.

Therefore, it was noteworthy when Reagan kicked off his 1980 general election campaign with a speech on states' rights given at the Neshoba County Fair in rural Mississippi. The fairgrounds were three miles from Philadelphia, Mississippi, where Ku Klux Klan members murdered civil rights workers James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner in 1964. Reagan won twelve of the Solid South states in 1980, even though Jimmy Carter was a southerner. Reagan swept the Solid South states in 1984.

Although Reagan never said anything racist in public, in private, things were different. When African delegates to the United Nations celebrated the recognition of the People's Republic of China by dancing on the General Assembly floor, Governor Reagan called President Nixon to vent his frustration: "To see those, those monkeys from those African countries – damn them, they're still uncomfortable wearing shoes!" (This conversation was recorded by Nixon.)

19. By 1980, Jimmy Carter had become very unpopular: the economy was undergoing stagnation and inflation; the Iran hostage crisis was dragging on; the energy crisis was still fresh in the minds of the voters. Reagan defeated Carter in a landslide, 489 to 49 electoral votes.

20. Only two months after Reagan's inauguration, he was shot in the chest by an assassin. The bullet missed

his heart by less than an inch. While lying on the operating table, with the anesthesiologist preparing to put him under, Reagan looked up at the surgical team and said, "Please tell me you're all Republicans."

The leader of the team replied, "Today, Mr. President, we are all Republicans."

21. Reagan's first two major domestic legislative actions were to pass a massive tax cut and slash federal spending on education and health and human services. The tax cut was a reduction of ten percent across the board every year for three years for all individual taxpayers, making it a total cut of thirty percent. To partially offset the shortfall in revenue, school funding was reduced by 20 percent. Food-stamp funding fell 15 percent. School lunches lost a third of their funding, and Medicaid lost around \$1 billion. The Job Corps lost one-fifth of its budget, and the CETA program of apprenticeships lost all its funding. Support for public housing fell by 40 percent, for the arts and humanities 30 percent.

22. Reagan proved his conservative bona fides with his handling of the air traffic controllers strike in 1981. The Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization (PATCO), which had approximately 13,000 members, called a strike for better working conditions. However, the strike was illegal – a federal statute banned strikes by government unions. Reagan declared the strikes a "peril to national safety" and ordered the strikers back to work under the terms of the Taft-Hartley Act. When 11,345 controllers refused to return to work, Reagan fired them and banned them from federal service *for life* – even though PATCO had been one of the few labor unions to support him for president in 1980. (President Clinton rescinded the ban in 1993.)

Firing the controllers left air traffic control in the hands of managerial staff, 1,300 non-striking controllers, military controllers, etc., until new controllers could be trained (a three-year process). Some critics predicted a rash of accidents, but this did not happen, and Reagan emerged from the controversy victorious. It took ten years for air traffic controller staffing levels to return to normal.

Firing the PATCO strikers also sent a clear message to corporate America – it was acceptable, in the eyes of this administration, to deal harshly with labor unions.

23. The Reagan defense buildup was predicated on the belief that the Soviet Union had not abided by the limitations of the SALT II treaty intended to maintain nuclear parity between the two superpowers. Since the Soviets had a much larger conventional force than the U.S., Reagan was concerned that they would press their advantage throughout the world and force the West to disarm. Consequently, Reagan gave military spending priority over his promise to balance the budget.

In 1981, Reagan submitted the largest peacetime military budget in history – \$220 billion. Moreover, he asked for 7 percent annual increases through 1985, a total of \$1 trillion. The growing defense budget, coupled with Reagan's record-setting tax cuts and his reluctance to cut domestic entitlement programs, caused huge budget deficits and increased the national debt from \$994 billion to \$2.87 trillion during his administration.

24. The Middle East was a constant source of trouble throughout Reagan's presidency. In August 1982 he sent 800 Marines to Lebanon as part of a multinational peacekeeping force. The conflict there involved Israel, the Palestine Liberation Organization, and Hezbollah, a terrorist group sponsored by Iran and Syria. In April of 1983, Hezbollah bombed the American Embassy in Beirut, killing 17 Americans. In October 1983, Hezbollah blew up the Marine barracks in Beirut, killing 241 U.S. servicemen and wounding 100 others, many of whom suffered permanent injuries. Reagan called it "The saddest day of my life." He retaliated with airstrikes against Hezbollah leadership, then withdrew all the surviving marines. He would not again send troops into Lebanon or any other place in the Middle East.

In 1984 and 1985, Hezbollah took hostage seven Americans living in Lebanon, hoping to force a shift in U.S. policy in the Middle East, which they considered anti-Arab and pro-Israel. Reagan desperately wanted to free the hostages, but he and his advisors were publicly adamant that they would not negotiate with terrorists. However, the longer the hostages remained captive, the more Reagan longed for their release.

25. Reagan was ill-prepared for the first presidential debate with Democrat Walter Mondale in 1984. He stumbled over lines and responded ineffectively to Mondale's charges that he favored reducing Medicare and Social Security benefits. His poor performance raised a question in many people's minds: Was he, at 73, too old to be president?

At the second debate, Reagan responded – in deadpan fashion – to a question about his age by saying, "I will not make age an issue in the campaign ... I am not going to exploit, for political purposes, my opponent's youth and inexperience." Mondale laughed uncomfortably, realizing that Reagan had disposed of the age issue with his one-liner.

In general, Americans were pleased that Reagan had cut their taxes and that the country seemed to be doing well. Mondale tried to make the budget deficit an issue, but it didn't resonate with the voters. Reagan

defeated Mondale in a landslide, 525 to 13 electoral votes. Mondale won only one state – his home state of Minnesota – and he won it by fewer than 4,000 votes.

26. The Iran-Contra affair was a scandal that had two components. The first was the clandestine sale in 1985 and 1986 of U.S. military equipment – primarily 2,500 anti-tank missiles – to Iran in exchange for cash and the release of the U.S. hostages held by Hezbollah. This transaction violated the administration's policy of not negotiating with terrorists and its policy of neutrality in the Iran-Iraq war. The "Contra" part of the affair was the diversion of some of the profits from the Iran arms deal to the Contra rebels, a right-wing militia group that opposed Nicaragua's left-wing Sandinista government.

U.S. support for the Contras had been prohibited explicitly by the Boland Amendments, which were passed by Congress in 1982 and 1984. However, Reagan's national security team funneled money from the Iran arms deal to the Contras, in direct violation of the Boland Amendments. Reagan administration officials impeded the ensuing investigation by destroying or withholding large numbers of relevant documents. Reagan at first denied any role in the Iran or Contra deals, but later admitted that he had authorized the Iran arms-for-hostages deal. He insisted that he had no knowledge of the diversion of funds to the Contras and that members of the National Security Council had done this without his knowledge.

In the end, fourteen Reagan administration officials were indicted for various crimes. Secretary of Defense Casper Weinberger was indicted on two counts of perjury and one count of obstruction of justice. He received a pardon from President George H. W. Bush before he was tried. National Security Advisor Robert McFarlane and Assistant Secretary of State Elliot Abrams were both convicted of withholding evidence and pardoned by Bush. National Security Advisor John Poindexter was convicted on five counts: conspiracy, obstruction of justice, perjury, defrauding the government, and destruction of evidence. The D.C. circuit court overturned these convictions on a technicality by a vote of 2 to 1, and the Supreme Court refused to hear the case. Bush also pardoned three senior CIA officials who had been convicted or indicted. After these pardons, Lawrence E. Walsh, the independent counsel in charge of the Iran-Contra affair, said, "the Iran-Contra cover-up, which has continued for more than six years, has now been completed."

27. In 1985, the new Soviet premier, Mikhail Gorbachev, recognized that the Soviet economy could not survive without serious reforms. He also believed that a less antagonistic Soviet-American relationship would permit a shift of money and resources away from the Soviet military toward the suffering economy.

British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher told Reagan that Gorbachev was "an unusual Russian" who was open to discussions, so Reagan wrote to him and asked for a meeting. The two men met five times between 1985 and 1988, and they got along very well. In 1987, they signed the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Force Treaty, which called for the destruction of more than 2,600 Soviet and American nuclear weapons. Some scholars give Gorbachev credit for this breakthrough, but others maintain that Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative, which the Soviets could not afford to emulate, forced Gorbachev's hand. In any case, Reagan's flexibility contributed to a stunningly unanticipated relaxation of tensions between the two superpowers.

In the following years, the Soviet Union continued to decline. The Berlin Wall fell ten months after the end of Reagan's term. In 1990, Germany reunified, and East Germany ceased to exist. And on December 26, 1991, the Soviet Union collapsed.

28. Reagan was slow to react to the AIDS epidemic, but he did address it. AIDS was identified clinically in 1981, i.e., at the beginning of Reagan's first term. He did not speak out about it until 1985 when he discovered that his friend Rock Hudson had contracted it. In September 1985, Reagan called fighting AIDS one of the administration's "top priorities." On February 5, 1986, he paid a surprise visit to the Health and Human Services department (HHS) to speak out against AIDS, calling it "one of our highest public-health priorities," and ordered his Surgeon General, Dr. C. Everett Koop, to prepare a report that focused on prevention. In October 1986, Koop issued his report, which starkly outlined the epidemic's gravity and three steps for prevention: abstinence, monogamy, and condoms.

The Reagan administration found it difficult to speak with one voice on AIDS. Social and religious conservatives within the administration objected to Koop's explicit endorsement of condoms and what they saw as his implicit acceptance of homosexuality. But Reagan's HHS secretary, Margaret Heckler, was in the forefront of those who sought aggressive government action. As early as 1983, she called AIDS her "number one priority" and, with Reagan's backing, won congressional authority to transfer funds within HHS from other programs to use on AIDS research. Spending for AIDS became a contentious priority during the rest of Reagan's presidency; by 1989, the federal government was spending \$2.3 billion a year on research and AIDS prevention.

While Reagan spent more on AIDS and spoke out against the disease earlier than his critics generally acknowledge, he is still faulted for not using the full power of the presidential "bully pulpit" to rouse the nation about the dangers and causes of the disease. At the urging of Nancy Reagan, he did so on May 31,

1987, saying, "There's no reason for those who carry the AIDS virus to wear a scarlet A." Reagan's critics on the left said that the speech was too little, too late. Some social conservatives criticized Reagan for giving the address at all.

29. Reagan left a substantial political legacy in the Republican party. Since he was a conservative and scored two huge landslide victories, the Republican party has become more and more conservative over time. In particular, keeping taxes low (even on the wealthy) has become an article of faith for the GOP, because that gets you re-elected. Almost all of the major candidates for the 2012 and 2016 Republican presidential nominations considered themselves to be staunch conservatives.

30. Nancy Reagan was a Hollywood actress when she met Reagan, but she gave up her acting career after they married in 1952. She was a strong-minded First Lady who was very protective of her husband. In particular, she made her opinions known (internally) with respect to how the actions of the White House staff reflected upon Reagan. During Reagan's first term, when James Baker was chief of staff, she worked amicably through Senior Counselor Michael Deaver. When Don Regan became chief of staff after Deaver had left, Nancy and Regan did not get along, and she convinced Reagan to fire him. Mrs. Reagan's signature program as first lady was her "Just Say No" initiative that encouraged young people to stay away from drugs.

31. On November 5, 1994, Reagan addressed a letter to the American people. It read in part: "My Fellow Americans. I have recently been told that I am one of the millions of Americans who will be afflicted with Alzheimer's disease." In the years after his announcement, Reagan largely disappeared from public view as Alzheimer's took its terrible toll. The forthrightness and courage with which he and Nancy Reagan faced this ordeal raised public awareness and inspired a deluge of contributions to organizations dedicated to finding the cause of and a cure for the disease. Reagan died on June 5, 2004.

32. Reagan had a wonderful sense of humor that he used to put people at ease in both formal and informal settings. He told the following story at the 1983 meeting of the National Association of Evangelicals.

An evangelical minister and a politician arrived at heaven's gate one day together. And St. Peter, after doing all the necessary formalities, took them in hand to show them where their quarters would be. And he took them to a small, single room with a bed, a chair, and a table and said this was for the clergyman. And the politician was a little bit worried about what might be in store for him. And he couldn't believe it when St. Peter stopped in front of a beautiful mansion with lovely grounds and many servants and told him that these would be his quarters. And he could not help but ask, 'But wait, there's something wrong. How do I get this mansion while that good and holy man only gets a single room?' And St. Peter said, 'You have to understand how things are up here. We've got thousands and thousands of clergy. You're the first politician who ever made it.'

See the next page for a list of references.

References

1. H.W. Brands, *Reagan: The Life* (2015).
2. Lou Cannon, *Governor Reagan: His Rise to Power* (2003).
3. Lou Cannon, *President Reagan: The Role of a Lifetime* (2000).
3. James T. Patterson, "Ronald Reagan," in *To the Best of My Ability*, edited by James M. McPherson (2000).
4. Nancy Gibbs and Michael Duffy, *The Presidents Club* (2012).
5. John Dickerson, *Whistlestop: My Favorite Stories from Presidential Campaign History* (2016).