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Reagan Was Right: Government Is The Problem

Charlton Heston



CHARLTON HESTON, recipient of the Academy Award for Best Actor for his performance in *Ben-Hur* in 1959, has also received many international awards. He served six terms as president of the Screen Actors Guild, was chairman of the American Film Institute, and was a member of the National Council on the Arts. In 1978, he received the Jean Hersholt Humanitarian Award from the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

On September 9-10, 1990, Hillsdale College launched its FreedomQuest capital campaign. With a goal of \$151 million, it was at the time the largest small college fundraising effort ever undertaken.

The two-day gala event began with a special Firing Line debate, featuring host William F. Buckley, Jr., Congressman Dick Armey, actor Charlton Heston, and former U.N. Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick for the affirmative side, adopting the resolution: "Government is not the solution, it is the problem." Opposing this team were former U.S. Senators Gary Hart and George McGovern, Congressman Patricia Schroeder, and actor Dennis Weaver. Moderated by New Republic senior editor Michael Kinsley and filmed on the Hillsdale campus, the debate aired on PBS stations to an estimated audience of over three and a half million viewers.

The opening arguments of one of the participants, Charlton Heston, are presented here along with additional remarks Mr. Heston delivered on September 10 upon accepting Hillsdale College's Freedom Leadership Award.

Charlton Heston's Opening Statement

It is seldom that liberty of any kind is lost all at once. David Hume, the great Scottish philosopher, said that. I am a Scot myself. He was bloody right. For more than half a century, the shining Republic created by the blood of the Continental Army and a few great men has been nearly nibbled to death by the Democratic ducks in the Congress and a warmly cooperative Supreme Court.

There is now no aspect of American life, public or private, that the federal govern-

ment does not invade, instruct and finally coerce to its will. Farm and factory, home and school, university and research center, club and playground—all are overlaid with a spidery network of laws, guidelines, restrictions and Draconian penalties that stifle the spirit, the energy, and the creative capacity of what was once the freest nation on earth. In this hemisphere, now that Ortega and Noriega have fallen, the collectivist sentiments discredited around the world fly best, I fear, in Cuba and Washington, D.C.

Of course, government is the problem. The armies of bureaucrats proliferating like gerbils, scurrying like lemmings in pursuit of the ever-expanding federal agenda testify to that amply. Thomas Jefferson, the only genius we ever had, said that government is best which governs least. I am amazed you Democrats are still comfortable with Mr. Jefferson as your designated logo.

Questions Directed to Mr. Heston

Rep. Pat Schroeder:

I certainly hope that you are also going to stand strong with us and keep the federal government out of bedrooms. I know people who are on your side also like to get people into the private lives of folks. And I've always found it really amazing in that your side often trusts corporations and fat cats to do anything and they want them deregulated, but they want to regulate the private lives of people. I hope you clearly are against that also.

Heston:

Well, as the fellow that took down the original dictation on the Ten Commandments, I am naturally opposed to adultery.

Schroeder:

Would you have federal adultery police?

Heston:

No.

Sen. George McGovern:

Mr. Heston, I made reference to the savings and loan crisis. This is probably the most embarrassing and expensive financial scandal in the 200-year history of the country. Some people think that a major contributor to that was the breakdown of government regulation—we actually weakened the regulatory agencies and it was the kind of an atmosphere in the country to let people do what they wanted to in the private sector. What's your assessment of how well that theory has worked in the savings and loan industry where everybody was more or less allowed to run wild without any kind of government supervision?

Heston:

I think certainly there was grievous dereliction of duty there on the part of the government, specifically the Congress. We lost the Speaker of the House, Jim Wright; we are about to lose the senior senator from California, Alan Cranston, because of their involvement. There were certainly congressmen and senators in both parties that were involved in this. But I don't think the handling of the program speaks well for the function of government.

Sen. George McGovern:

...as I understand your view here tonight, you would intend, wherever possible, to eliminate government supervision and government regulation. Obviously, we have a lot of scandalous behavior on the part of both the Congress and the executive branch, but is your argument that things would have been better in the savings and loan industry if we had less government regulation and less government supervision?

Heston:

Certainly it would have been better if the little cadre in Congress had not, in kind of a quiet meeting in the [Congressional] Cloak Room, said, "Well, look, let's guarantee loans up to \$100,000." That was a little careless!

Dennis Weaver:

Chuck, I just wondered—you don't mind if I call you Chuck, do you? You said government is not the solution; it's the problem. What do you consider to be the solution in situations like we have in our inner cities where our young people there are unemployed at a horrendous rate of [something] like 50 percent? And we have so much crime going on there because there's really no incentive for these young people. I just wonder what your solution would be?

Heston:

I think you have to consider very carefully what kind of regulations must be put in place. I think there's an instinct to pass a law, any law, and see if it flies or not. We are both Californians. As you know, we are considering Proposition 128, which is a massive environmental control bill. Now you can't be against controlling the environment—clean air—all that. That's like being against apple pie. But they are just starting to figure out that that bill passed as currently worded in this fall's election is going to cost California taxpayers \$4 billion.

Weaver:

Do you realize what it would cost them if it isn't passed? They're life supports.

Heston:

I think that's an example of excessive government activity without gains.

Sen. Gary Hart:

I'd like to provide three or four examples of government services and see which ones you think the government should not do: cleaning up toxic waste dumps, protecting worker safety on the job, delivering Social Security checks to elderly people, regulating airline services, or providing poor children the opportunity for advancement through a Head Start program.

Heston:

I think a good case is the minority children who are getting insufficient housing,

insufficient education. I think government is going at it the wrong way. I think what we have to do is improve the schools, provide employment opportunities—not provide affirmative action programs that amount to mandated quotas in jobs, educational opportunities, things of that kind.

Charlton Heston Accepts the Freedom Leadership Award

I am delighted to be at Hillsdale College and am honored by the award with which I have been presented. I have looked forward to visiting this heartland campus for some time, especially upon the occasion of the *Firing Line* debate that enlivened last evening. It was wonderful to be in such distinguished company as Jeane Kirkpatrick and Bill Buckley and the opposing team of debaters, even if they seemed a little daunted by history.

I first met your president, George Roche, when we served on a presidential task force on the arts and humanities in 1981. We deliberated for some four months before completing our report and submitting it to President Reagan. I am proud to say that once our job was over, we dissolved the task force. It is no more. Anybody who knows much about Washington, D.C., knows just how rare a feat that was.

In wending my way through the imposing corridors and rabbit warrens of our nation's Capitol, on a variety of often trivial errands, I sometimes wondered whether behind some walnut door with a brass knob in an obscure corner of a marble corridor I would find an ancient gentleman with a green eye shade and sleeve garters writing with a quill pen. Likely as not, he would be finishing revisions on a report first submitted in 1910.

All the time I have known him, George has politely urged me to visit Hillsdale. And upon each occasion when an invitation was extended, I have said, "Yes, I really want to do that." But various

In Defense of Liberty

Hillsdale College has a 164-year history of "Pursuing truth and defending liberty."

A corollary of this mission—which sets Hillsdale College apart—is its refusal of all forms of federal and state taxpayer subsidies, even in the form of student grants and loans, which requires the College to raise well over \$6 million annually that its similar-sized competitors receive from the government. Friends who support this independence initiative believe that investing in Hillsdale students is an investment in America's future.

Many of Hillsdale's privately funded scholarships are geared toward rewarding appreciation of our rights under the Constitution and the practice of self-reliant citizenship. For instance, the Roland L. Ebersole Scholarship provides up to full tuition for qualified students who belong to the National Rifle Association or other shooting advocacy clubs and organizations.

An extension of the Ebersole legacy is the ongoing development of a 72-acre Hillsdale College shooting range. Consulting on the range design is Master Shotgun Instructor Michael Murphy of Augusta, Kansas. The facility will offer students, faculty, staff, alumni and friends of the College an opportunity to practice and compete in American trap and skeet, international trap and skeet, and sporting clays.

The Marksmanship Club at Hillsdale College is quickly forming ranks, and participants of all skill levels—from beginning enthusiasts to accomplished competitive shooters—are welcome to join. The club will focus on developing shooting skills and firearm safety as well as participation in regional and national shooting competitions.

For further information on marksmanship at Hillsdale College, or how you can help smart and ambitious Hillsdale students with need- or merit-based aid, please contact John Cervini, Vice President for Institutional Advancement, at (517) 607-2475 or e-mail john.cervini@hillsdale.edu

circumstances have prevented it until now.

You should have been more eloquent, George; I didn't know what you had here. As another visitor to the Hillsdale campus declared a few years ago, "This isn't a college—this is a 1940 movie set of what a college ought to be." I absolutely concur.

I congratulate Hillsdale on its extraordinary success. I wish there were even as few as 10 Hillsdale Colleges around the country—they would be enough to transform American education overnight. I suppose God in His grace will not grant that in my lifetime. I understand, however, why tenured professors from large, prestigious universities take salary cuts to

come and teach here. I understand why hundreds of thousands of people know about this little rural school and why it has been able to gain national attention for its fight to remain independent.

I suspect that one of the reasons why this has happened and why Hillsdale is thriving (well, you have only been at it since 1844, so I suppose you ought to have gotten somewhere) is the quality of its leadership. I believe that we live in the century of the common man, but I also believe in extraordinary men and women who make a real difference in the world. I

think that some of them are leading this college and thus you are to be congratulated. ■



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