

Dear friends,

I am honored to have been invited to participate in this commemorative discussion in honor of President Reagan's 100th birthday. I am also very disappointed that through my own fault of being old and frail I am unable to be with you and instead can only send a few words from the hospital bed. I was eagerly looking forward to this event because I think that the occasion – the centennial of Ronald Reagan - is both truly worthy of a celebration and a wonderful reason to reflect on the importance of principled politics in a democratic society.

Democracies are capable of achieving great things – the greatest in the history of humankind - but they need leaders that inspire such achievements. Ronald Reagan was such a leader. He was able to project optimism without being simplistic and to relate practical steps to a few very basic principles dear to all humans, such as political and economic freedom, respect for human dignity, and a sense of responsibility. This a very rare ability for a politician; too often, we see examples of politicians who are either consumed by details and unable to communicate a larger vision or populists who offer easy and false solutions based on slogans. Reagan was neither. He was able to find practical solutions, through, if needed, imperfect comprises and evolutionary steps, yet never to betray his principles. In American politics, another president, Abraham Lincoln, had the same ability to never lose sight of basic principles while engaged in practical politics. Of course, another link to Lincoln was Reagan's famous humor; I do not have statistics, but it feels that these two presidents hold a record on jokes and one-liners. On a personal level, I always felt that my late husband, Andrei Sakharov, had a similar outlook – he liked to say that difficult decisions must be based on simple principles.

This is what made it possible for Reagan to be both tough and pragmatic in foreign relations, particularly, with the Soviet Union. His leadership and his policies contributed greatly to the demise of the Soviet Union. We are seeing his legacy growing even now as civilization based on democracy, freedom of ideas, and human rights expands throughout the world.

For the Soviet Union's dissidents, Reagan's policies provided both moral and practical support. His administration was genuinely interested in helping the cause of freedom in the Soviet Union. Among many who helped us I want to mention two people from his administration whom I consider personal friends – George Shultz and Jack Matlock.

I apologize that these remarks are necessarily short as I dictated them in the hospital and while on respirator. Again, I am sorry that I am unable to be with you today, though in my thoughts I join you in this celebration.

My best wishes to everyone.

Elena Bonner

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The logo for the International Republican Institute (IRI) is located in the bottom right corner. It features a stylized globe with latitude and longitude lines, and the letters "IRI" in a large, bold, serif font below it.

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