Nonpolitical president? Forbes says he's the man

Steve Forbes, millionaire owner of Forbes magazine, was a candidate for the Republican presidential nomination in 1996. He spoke to freelance writer Scott Holleran about his candidacy for 2000.

First of two parts.

Interview with Steve Forbes

Several commentators have claimed you can't win the presidency. Can you win, and, if so, how?

Forbes: You'd have to ask them "Why can't he win?" and they'd say, "He doesn't have the traditional, political resume." Voters will judge what kind of style they prefer. But I think the traditional political resume is precisely what you don't need more of. Look what they've done to the schools. The richest country in the world has a laggard K-12 system. Patients can't choose their doctors. The tax code is ready-made for special interests. Our legal system is convoluted. [Professional politicians] have made a hash of a lot of things, and voters sense this.

Look what happened [with Gov. Jesse Ventura] in Minnesota. Talk about an unconventional resume. ... People realize that those who have the traditional political resume are not grappling in a serious way with their concerns and with real opportunities. I've run a business. Every two weeks, I have to meet payroll for 1,000 people just to stay in business. I have to know what they're thinking and what they want, and, in that sense, I have more interaction with real people than those cocooned in Washington. ... If I muck up here, I can't depend on the government to print money to keep me going. A press release isn't going to get the magazine out every two weeks.

Holleran: What do you say to those who claim that your speaking style in 1996 was stiff and repetitious and that you're not polished enough to run as the GOP nominee for president?

Forbes: Admittedly, I have been accused of being charismatically challenged. ... Part of participating in the public square means learning how you get your message across. It's an ongoing process. What made Ronald Reagan effective was not just his engaging style, but the fact that he was a man of principle with a sense of direction who had a vision that the American people found appealing and powerful. And his message was there. ... I think most voters are not interested in style; they want to know what is the content of [a candidate's] character.

Holleran: Some have argued that you should run for a smaller, statewide office first. Why not?

Forbes: If I wanted to pursue a traditional political career, those suggestions would be very helpful. But I got into politics because I was frustrated by the disconnect between Washington and the American people. Look at 1996. It's true that I'd never run for public office before, but I won two primaries, which is more than all the others on the Republican side who may run in 2000 have done. But more fundamentally, the issues we put on the table, which were then seen as unusual and untouchable, are now becoming part of the discussion: taxes, Social Security, health care.

Holleran: Are you going to run in 2000?

Forbes: I'm going to make that decision in the next few weeks.

Holleran: Are you inclined to run?

Forbes: Yes, I'm leaning that way.

Holleran: What do you think of Elizabeth Dole and George W. Bush?

Forbes: Both, if they run, will be formidable. She was the highlight of the 1996 GOP convention. She's disciplined, and she's focused. If she runs, we'll have to find out about her views. She would be a very strong presence. Bush has been a good governor, and he would be a very strong candidate and, again, he'd have to outline an agenda. Voters want steak, not sizzle.

Holleran: Is Larry Flynt going to reveal anything about Steve Forbes?

Forbes: I'm sure they've already looked.

Holleran: There are no skeletons in your closet? You're a Boy Scout?

Forbes: I didn't join the Boy Scouts.

COMMENTARY

Undermining good intentions

By Maxwell King



ARTHUR B. OSTROFF

The Ardrossan Beagles are fidgeting in their kennel, expectantly shifting about in hopes of some excitement on this cool and cloudy weekday in January. They let out a high-pitched rattle of barking through the chain-link fence as Bobby Scott drives by.

The brown-and-white Ayrshire dairy herd is gone now — sold to a farm in Colorado — and Black Angus cattle have taken their place, milling around a feeding stand in the pasture below the big brick mansion built by Col. Robert L. Montgomery, Bobby's grandfather.

One of the calves is missing, and the farmer who tends the new herd stops Scott's car to see if he has seen the errant animal in the low brush that surrounds the handsome old mansion, designed by society architect Horace Trumbauer in 1911.

It's been just four years now since the death, at 90, of Hope Montgomery Scott — whose joyful exuberance for farming animated Ardrossan, this majestic estate in the middle of Radnor Township on the Main Line.

The Scott family is trying to keep Ardrossan farm as open space. Radnor shouldn't undermine its effort with new prohibitive, agricultural zoning laws.

Now it falls to her heirs to somehow sustain this 700-acre magnificence of rolling fields and woods, stone barns and elegant houses. Her family, led by her son, Robert Montgomery Scott — Bobby to many of his friends — is committed to keeping most of Ardrossan true to its green-space farming heritage.

But taxes, trust law and the tide of suburban development along the length of the Main Line are all forces of erosion, swirling around Ardrossan's beautiful, open spaces.

"All the family loves this place and all have a great feeling for the land and the country around it," says Scott. "We know we can't hold onto it forever, but we'd like to, as much as possible, keep the open spaces."

Hope Scott inherited this feeling for the land from her parents, who started the Ayrshire herd when they built Ardrossan, named after a town in Scotland that was home to their ancestors.

The family was wealthy enough to hold onto the land while suburban development flowed all around it, consuming much of the land in Radnor and other Main Line communities.

And Hope Scott led a storybook socialite life. She was a champion horseback rider and fox hunter who, with her husband, Edgar Scott, threw some of the best parties in town. This glamorous life was immortalized by playwright Philip Barry, who made her famous as the Tracy Lord character in his 1939 play, *The Philadelphia Story*.

But she was always up early the next morning and down to the barnyard to work; it was this passion for the farm, and the land, that really defined her life. And it is the farm that is Hope Scott's greatest legacy. Ardrossan, just by its size, its beauty and its position in the middle of one of the most expensive of suburbs, has become a symbol for the struggle to keep green space in urban America.

For Ardrossan, this struggle has reached a difficult crossroads: two of the usual paths to the conservation of green space — tax incentives and regulation — are in conflict.

And the future of these rolling fields and wooded hills hangs in the balance.

Early in the century, Hope's father, Col. Montgomery, put the farm in trust to ensure that no impecunious member of his family would squander its resources.

The family's ownership of the farm is still in these trusts, which require, by law, the sort of ambitious financial results that the colonel was famous for.

This requirement limits the family's options. But Bobby Scott and his nephew, Edgar Scott 3d, seem to have found an answer:

By using the tax advantages that come with conservation easements, they already have profitably developed the 172-acre, northern portion of the farm in a way that has kept the land largely open.

Just seven new houses are being built on this land (three already exist), all the land is staying open, and conservation easements severely limit any future building.

The result: The family profits (as Col. Montgomery and his trusts require), and Radnor keeps Ardrossan Farms green. That's how the tax-incentive part works.

Here's the regulatory part: Radnor is considering new agricultural zoning rules that could limit the development potential of Ardrossan (which is really the last big piece of agricultural land left in the area.)

The township's motivations are, ironically enough, the same as the Scott family's: to keep as much green space as possible.

But here's the problem: The family wants to keep open space *and* make money. They would like to develop another 200- to 250-acre piece at the southern end of the farm, using the same conservation-easement system they used in the north, and then keep the rest of the farm in trust — and open — for the family.

The new zoning could result in the loss of the conservation-easement tax advantages that the Scotts rely upon to make their very low-density development plan work for all.

So here's the real irony: Tax incentives and regulation can both work to save open spaces; but, taken together here in Radnor, they may destroy everybody's green plans.

It doesn't take the financial savvy of a Col. Montgomery to realize that if the family just goes ahead and files an old-style, sprawl-development plan under the existing two-acre zoning, they can make a lot of money.

And ruin Ardrossan Farms and the legacy of Hope Montgomery Scott forever.

This seems like a good time, then, to separate incentives and regulation ... and a good time for Radnor to just sit on its new zoning plan long enough to let a conscientious family work out its own way to save Ardrossan.

Maxwell King is associate editor of The Inquirer.

Thatcher and Reagan left legacies within and outside their countries

By Alvin S. Felzenberg

Last week, Ronald Reagan celebrated his 88th birthday. He often joked about his age, and he liked to remind audiences that he had witnessed a lot of history. Together with a kindred spirit across the seas, Margaret Thatcher, Ronald Reagan also made a lot of it.

America's oldest president and Britain's first woman prime minister made their mark on the world stage. Movements they inspired still carry their name. Their successors — even of opposite parties — incorporate their legacies into their own. Tony Blair's "New Britain" retains Thatcher's privatizations. Bill Clinton acts as if he believes "the era of big government is over."

What did Reagan and Thatcher do to merit this distinction?

Nothing small.

- They reversed the assumption that government would continue to grow in size and play an ever bigger role in people's lives.
- They ended the Cold War on terms that left the United States the world's sole superpower and more nations living under democratic rule than ever before.
- They lowered trade barriers, ushering in the era of globalization.
- They made conservatism a dynamic and respectable political force.

Thatcher and Reagan came to power under amazingly similar circumstances. Both were outside the central axis of their respective parties.

Thatcher set on her path to the prime ministership when she defeated Edward Heath in 1975 for opposition leader. She became prime minister three years later.

"Still living above the shop," this grocer's daughter from Grantham said as she moved into 10 Downing Street. Soon, Thatcher was strutting her stuff: resisting trade union intimidation; standing up to Argentine dictators on the Falklands.

Reagan, widely known through his acting and television careers, came to the attention of party leaders and activists when he spoke on behalf of Barry Goldwater in 1964. "The Speech" was one bright spot in an otherwise bleak campaign. Two years later, Reagan was California's governor. A series of unanticipated shocks, Watergate, spiraling inflation and the Iranian hostage crisis, plus his own confidence and strength, propelled him into the presidency.

Couples

Standout pairs who embodied the 20th century

Long before she met Reagan, Thatcher had been impressed by what he once told a British audience. At a time of increasing Soviet adventurism, Reagan had asked: "Will we spend our sunset years telling our children and our children's children what it was like when men were free? And what will our answer be if we are asked by those children, 'Where were we when freedom was lost, and what was it we found that seemed more precious to us than freedom?' "

No other Western politician talked this way. Had Reagan meant what he said?

Thatcher thought so. Officials at the State Department learned so after they repeatedly failed to persuade Reagan to delete passages from his "evil empire" address.

Alike in ideology, Reagan and Thatcher differed in their methods of operation. She paid close attention to detail. He preferred to gauge the "proper feel" of things. To her critics, Thatcher was the "iron lady." She displayed her mentoring and motherly side to close associates — including Reagan — in private. Reagan, warm and fuzzy to mass audiences, remained distant and detached offstage — even from those who knew him best.

Thatcher was less tolerant of deficits than Reagan. He was more effective in reducing inflation.

These two forged the closest relationship ever to exist between an American president and a British prime minister. Amiable though his relations with President Franklin Roosevelt were, Winston Churchill always knew he would be the junior partner. Presidents Eisenhower and Kennedy kept Harold Macmillan informed but rarely consulted with him. President Clinton's relationship with Blair appears grounded more in a convergence of interests than in chemistry.

Reagan and Thatcher were a team. As couples do, one helped the other, and one often followed the other's lead. Early in Reagan's presidency, Thatcher gave him cover when others within the G-7 thought Reagan was little more than an ill-informed cowboy. During the Falklands incident, Reagan stood down much of his own government to buy Thatcher time for her military moves to succeed. Her Britain became the only European country to offer the U.S. bases and air space when it bombed Libya. "I can do business with him," Thatcher said of Mikhail Gorbachev. Reagan was quick to pick up on this cue.

What other pair in recent memory left so indelible an imprint within and without the nations they led? Reagan and Thatcher were quite a couple. They changed the world.



Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher had complementary styles.

Alvin S. Felzenberg writes and lectures about the American presidency.

Tomorrow: "Alarms and Diversions" with David Boldt; "Urban Perspective" with Acel Moore.



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