Reagan Revolution Worksheet

Directions: Read the excerpt below & then answer the questions that follow using complete sentences.

On January 20, 1981, Ronald Reagan was inaugurated as president of the United States. Discontent with the weak economy & disillusionment with the apparent powerlessness of the United States to free hostages in Iran had resulted in a backlash against Democratic President Carter. The electorate had swept Reagan & a Republican Senate into power in the 1980 election. In his inaugural address, Reagan offered a broad outline of his plan for economic recovery (based largely on tax reduction & limitations on government regulation of business) & strengthening America as a “beacon of hope” for democracy.

Ronald Reagan’s Inaugural Address

The business of our nation goes forward. These United States are confronted with an economic affliction of great proportions. We suffer from the longest and one of the worst sustained inflations in our national history. It distorts our economic decisions, penalizes thrift, and crushes the struggling young and the fixed income elderly alike. It threatens to shatter the lives of millions of our people.

Idle industries have cast workers into unemployment, causing human misery and personal indignity. Those who do work are denied a fair return for their labor by a tax system which penalizes successful achievement and keeps us from maintaining full productivity.

But great as our tax burden is, it has not kept pace with public spending. For decades, we have piled deficit upon deficit, mortgaging our future and our children’s future for the temporary convenience of the present. To continue this long trend is to guarantee tremendous social, cultural, political, and economic upheavals.

You and I, as individuals, can, by borrowing, live beyond our means, but for only a limited period of time. Why, then, should we think that collectively, as a nation, we are not bound by that same limitation?...

This administration’s objective will be a healthy, vigorous, growing economy that provides equal opportunity for all Americans, with no barriers born of bigotry or discrimination. Putting America back to work means putting all Americans back to work. Ending inflation means freeing all Americans from the terror of runaway living costs. All must share in the productive work of this “new beginning” and all must share in the bounty of a revived economy. With the idealism and fair play which are the core of our system and our strength, we can have a strong and prosperous America at peace with itself and the world.

So, as we begin, let us take inventory. We are a nation that has a government – not the other way around. And this makes us special among the nations of the Earth. Our Government has no power except that granted it by the people. It is time to check and
reverse the growth of government which shows signs of having grown beyond the consent of the governed.

It is my intention to curb the size and influence of the Federal establishment and to demand recognition of the distinction between the powers granted to the Federal Government and those reserved to the States or to the people. All of us need to be reminded that the Federal Government did not create the States; the States created the Federal Government.

Now, so there will be no misunderstanding, it is not my intention to do away with the government. It is, rather, to make it work – work with us, not over us; to stand by our side, not ride on our back. Government can and must provide opportunity, not smother it; foster productivity, not stifle it...

In the days ahead I will propose removing the roadblocks that have slowed our economy and reduced productivity. Steps will be taken aimed at restoring the balance between the various levels of government. Progress may be slow – measured in inches and feet, not miles – but we will progress. It is time to reawaken this industrial giant, to get government back within its means, and to lighten our punitive tax burden. And these will be our first priorities, and on these principles, there will be no compromise.


1. What has been the relationship between public spending & taxes? How does Reagan propose to change this relationship?

2. What does Reagan assume will happen upon “putting America back to work”?

3. What historic truth does Reagan cite to justify cutting back on the federal government?

4. How does Reagan propose to remove the roadblocks causing inflation, unemployment, & lost productivity?

5. What do you think is the greatest strength in Reagan’s plan? What weakness do you see?