

MY VIEW: JOHN F. ANDREWS

Bush Sr. chose low road: From 'read my lips' to 'read my hips'

During the 1980 Republican primaries, George H. W. Bush dismissed Ronald Reagan's supply-side philosophy as "voodoo economics." But by the time he accepted his party's presidential nomination eight years later, he was endorsing that doctrine and embracing it with a pledge he soon came to regret: "Read my lips: no new taxes."

Two years later, as he neared the middle of what everyone expected to be the first of two terms in the White House, circumstances forced the president to begin hinting that it might be necessary to scuttle his famous campaign promise. Before he could put a revised budget in place, however, a group of reporters confronted him as he jogged in a St. Petersburg ballpark. When

asked whether he had anything further to say about taxation, an irritated chief executive "pointed to his backside and gibed, 'Read my hips'" (Time, October 22, 1990).

If any of those journalists had accepted the president's invitation, they might have construed his rude response as a grudging admission that he'd been right in the first place, and that the gross domestic product of a policy he'd adopted for political reasons had turned out to be even worse than he'd initially predicted: "doodoo economics."

Is it conceivable that those who call themselves conservative today will find the courage (and, yes, the patriotism) to follow the senior Bush and move beyond a dogma that has now been discredited not once but twice? Judging by their fervent

support for Privatizer Ryan, and judging by their determination to continue exploiting those at the bottom to enrich those at the top (a practice that has been denounced as "immoral" by an economist who headed Reagan's Office of Management and Budget), it seems most unlikely.

But let's not surrender hope. There are encouraging signs that responsible leadership may finally be gaining traction. If so, a desperate nation may yet be rescued from those who seem hellbent on privy-tizing the American dream.

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