

A Conversation with JEFF BELL

Jeff Bell is a writer, strategist, and two-time Republican nominee for the U.S. Senate (1978 and 2014). In this conversation, Bell discusses the Senate campaigns and his advocacy for supply-side economics and a return to the gold standard. Bell also reflects on major themes in the conservative movement from Barry Goldwater to Ronald Reagan. Finally, Bell and Kristol discuss the state of the Republican Party going into 2016.

On the Gold standard, Bell says: It is a moral thing. Social conservatives...are the ones who are most interested in the gold standard because it's kind of the government giving its word, having a level playing field, not playing games with the value of the money that everybody has to deal with.

On Reagan and the conservative movement, Bell says: He made it more populist, more pro-the Founding of America, more grassroots in nature, more pro-democracy in foreign policy. He transformed it at the same time that he was engaged with it. I think almost all of the decisions in which he changed the conservative movement were correct. He made it stronger, better, having a wider appeal. Supply-side [economics] was the single most important one of those changes.

On conservative populism, Bell says: Populism is a system of thought that involves optimism about people's ability to handle their own affairs as opposed to the ability of elites to handle their affairs for them. Optimism about people and optimism about people as voters, as economic actors, as family members. If you leave people in the position where they can have more of an appropriate influence on their own lives, they will do fine.

On recent Republican failures, Bell says: The biggest moment in the 2012 election was...the speech by Bill Clinton at the Democrat Convention. He asked: "Why would we turn the economy over to the people who got us in trouble in the first place?" And what was Mitt Romney's answer to that? None, there was no answer. No one on the Republican side did...You had to have a narrative about what had happened, where did we go wrong, where would I not go down the path that Bush or Obama did.

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[Between Goldwater and Reagan](#)

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[Conservative Ideas and 2016](#)