TIMELINES

- Paul Laxalt Timeline, prepared by Darby A. Morrisroe, Miller Center of Public Affairs, University of Virginia, 6/28/2001.

SELECTED WRITINGS AND PUBLIC STATEMENTS BY SENATOR PAUL LAXALT


- “President Ronald Reagan’s 85th Birthday Celebration,” transcript from *Larry King Live,* 2/6/1996.


GENERAL COMMENTARY ON SENATOR PAUL LAXALT


IMPORTANT ISSUES AND EVENTS

Federalism Panels

AWACS Sale
- Melinda Beck and John Lindsay, “Trying to Patch the AWACS Deal,” Newsweek, 10/5/1981.

Regulatory Reform

RNC General Chairman

Philippines Visit

McClatchy Suit

Senate Retirement and Presidential Bid
President Ronald Reagan
Oral History Project

Briefing Materials

Senator Paul Laxalt

October 9, 2001

Prepared by Darby A. Morrisroe, Research Assistant
June 2001
1962-1966  Laxalt serves as governor of Nevada.

1964  Laxalt and Reagan encounter one another while campaigning for Goldwater.

1974  Laxalt elected as a United States Senator from Nevada.

1975  At Reagan’s request, Laxalt heads the creation of a feasibility study of a 1980 Reagan presidential bid.


February  Laxalt criticizes President Ford’s comment at a news conference that Reagan is too conservative to win a national election.  (*New York Times*, 2/19/1976)


September  Following Reagan’s defeat at the Republican National Convention, Laxalt agrees to join the new Ford campaign steering committee. (*New York Times*, 9/1/1976)

1977  


August  Laxalt is among five Republican senators to file suit seeking an injunction to prevent enforcement of limits on their outside earnings contained in a new Senate code of ethics. “We are trying to protect the Senate from its own folly,” says Laxalt. (*New York Times*, 8/18/1977)

December  Laxalt is mentioned as a possible Republican presidential candidate in 1980, if Ronald Reagan steps aside. (*Newsweek*, 12/12/1977)

Laxalt and Senator Dole (R-KS) visit Panama for a personal inspection of the canal. After touring the waterway the Senators say they remain opposed to the neutrality treaties. While in Panama, the two agree to meet with Panamanian leader General Omar Torirjos. (*Washington Post*, 12/31/1977)
1978

February

Laxalt takes a leading role in Senate debate on the Panama Canal. In opposing the Panama Canal neutrality treaty, Laxalt warns of the risk of Soviet and Cuban involvement in the canal if the U.S. loses control. (*New York Times*, 2/9/1978)

1979

February

Laxalt says that a constitutional amendment requiring a balanced budget should be proposed by Congress and not by a constitutional convention, which could “lose control” and upset basic Congressional protections. (*New York Times*, 2/5/1979)

March

Reagan launches his third campaign for the presidency, announcing he will form an exploratory committee to raise funds for his presidential bid. Laxalt, who notes that “not since Gen. Eisenhower’s first election almost 30 years ago has there been such a perfect ‘fit’ between the man and the public mood as there is today with Gov. Reagan and the American people,” makes the announcement. Laxalt will again serve as chairman of Reagan’s presidential campaign committee. (*Newsweek*, 3/10/1979)

December

Laxalt relinquishes some of his duties as campaign chairman, particularly as a touring Reagan spokesman, to Rep. Jack Kemp (R-NY). Laxalt explains that he faces a difficult re-election campaign of his own. (*Newsweek*, 12/10/1979)

Laxalt introduces the “Regulatory Flexibility and Administrative Reform Act of 1979,” a comprehensive piece of legislation aimed at improving and streamlining the federal regulatory process. (*Washington Post*, 12/19/1979)

1980

March

Laxalt announces that Reagan will not make his choice of a running mate known until after he has been nominated at the convention. (*New York Times*, 3/22/1980)

June

Laxalt, who had been among those Republicans calling for the departure of Bill Brock as chairman of the Republican National Committee, says that he hopes the issue will be decided in a meeting between Brock and Reagan, with the help of “a comprehensive report” on the Republican National Committee. Bowing to pressure from party moderates, Ronald Reagan ultimately decides to retain Bill Brock as chairman of the RNC. At a joint news conference, Reagan and Brock said that Drew Lewis, a National Committeeman from Pennsylvania who is the Reagan campaign chairman for that state, would take a new post as deputy chairman of the Republican National Committee. (*Washington Post*, 6/12/1980 and *New York Times*, 6/14/1980)

Laxalt unveils a series of congressional task forces designed to allow Reagan to make greater use of GOP congressional expertise in a variety of complex issue areas. (*Washington Post*, 6/19/1980)
Laxalt and other Republican Senators draft a charter for the Federal Bureau of Investigation that would eliminate many of the administrative controls restricting the agency’s activities. (*New York Times*, 6/22/1980)

**July**

Senator Laxalt’s name is frequently mentioned as a possible vice-presidential choice. It is reported that Senator Laxalt is among the eight men Reagan has asked to submit personal and financial information. (*National Journal*, 7/5/1980)

Laxalt nominates Reagan at the Republican National Convention in Detroit. Laxalt is reportedly upset at his exclusion from the convention negotiations to draft President Ford onto the ticket and with the selection of George Bush as a running mate. He is not present for the acceptance speeches at the end of the convention. (*National Journal*, 7/26/1980)

Laxalt says that George Bush was the “strongest possible running mate” for Ronald Reagan and predicts that there will be no problems in the fall from conservatives originally disgruntled over the selection of Bush. (*New York Times*, 7/23/1980)

**September**

Laxalt calls on the news media to maintain a “clean political campaign” in the face of alleged mudslinging by the Carter-Mondale team. In an “open letter” to editorial writers, Laxalt recites a history, going back 14 years, to illustrate his charge that Carter has engaged in “personal attacks, innuendo and outright smears” over the course of his political life. (*Washington Post*, 9/1/1980)

**November**

In the wake of speculation about cabinet appointments, Laxalt announces, “There’s been absolutely no determination made on anybody -- not even any hints.” Laxalt says Reagan would like to have his Cabinet in place by early December. “We have a lot of names,” he adds. “It’s a very, very rough list . . . I have a suspicion there are a number of campaigns going. I’ve been on the receiving end of a few of them.” Laxalt takes himself off the lists, declaring he intends to stay in the Senate. (*Washington Post*, 11/6/1980)

Laxalt and Edwin Meese, III, the chief of the Reagan transition staff, announce in separate televised interviews that Reagan would be pleased if a cut in levies was passed by the lame-duck session of Congress that will convene mid-month. (*New York Times*, 11/10/1980)

Senator Laxalt is to be included in the meetings of a group that is to function as the President’s “board of directors.” A spokesman for Laxalt says that the Senator expects to have his own support staff, anywhere from one to six persons, within the White House. (*National Journal*, 11/22/1980)

Laxalt says he plans to help obtain support for Reagan’s legislative agenda, seeing
his role as “troubleshooter on major issues.” In Congress, says Laxalt, he will try to “be the eyes and ears of President Reagan, without getting into the hair of the leadership.” (Newsweek, 11/24/1980)

Laxalt is named a member of Reagan’s “transition executive committee” and plays a central role in the selection of cabinet officials. (National Journal, 11/29/1980)

1981

February

Following Reagan’s televised address to the nation, Laxalt says “This is the kickoff for his second campaign in two years, the first to win the Presidency and the second to sell his program to the people and through them, to Congress. It’s part of an inside-outside campaign. He’s going to be playing the role of educator.” (New York Times, 2/5/1981)

April

Laxalt is named to chair the Presidential Federal Advisory Committee and the Coordinating Task Force on Federalism, which, in keeping with a campaign promise, will study ways to return more power to states and localities. The “inner wheel” and the “outer wheel” of President Reagan’s advisory bodies on federalism are concentric circles. The inner wheel, the Coordinating Task Force on Federalism, is composed of White House staff and Cabinet members. They also are part of the outer wheel, the Presidential Advisory Committee on Federalism, which has 39 additional members drawn from Congress, state and local government and the private sector. (National Journal, 4/18/1981 and 5/2/1981)

June

Laxalt has a surprise meeting with French President Francois Mitterrand in the Atlantic resort town of Biarritz. Laxalt was attending the Paris air show as part of a U.S. congressional delegation. (Washington Post, 6/9/1981)

Laxalt and Senator Jake Garn of Utah announce their opposition to the deployment of MX mobile missiles in their home states. They suggest that MX missiles be based in Minuteman silos instead of new shelters. (New York Times, 6/26/1981)

July

Reagan nominates Sandra Day O’Connor to the Supreme Court. Laxalt strongly backs the nomination. (Economist, 7/11/1981)

Laxalt says the president “is very positive that he is going to run” for re-election in 1984. According to Laxalt, the two already have set aside a gift bottle of pear brandy that they intend to open when Reagan wins a second term. (U.S. News & World Report, 7/13/1981)

September

Laxalt voices concern over the AWACS sale. Laxalt argues that “we would be derelict in our security responsibilities” not to maintain at least “joint control” of
any AWACS planes sold to Saudi Arabia or, for that matter, even a NATO ally.”

**December**

Richard Richards, the Republican National Committee chairman, comes under heavy fire from top GOP figures who doubt that he can lead the party in the tough election year of 1982. Laxalt is increasingly mentioned as an ideal successor to Richards. (U.S. News & World Report, 12/21/1981)

**1982**

**March**

Predicting that Republicans will lose 30 or more House seats in November if the budget impasse is not broken soon, Laxalt calls on the president to signal quickly that he is willing to compromise on both defense spending and Social Security benefits. Laxalt’s warning that “time is running out” on a budget compromise comes as senior White House aides indicate some readiness to give ground on spending questions as long as the original Reagan three-year tax cut is preserved. (Washington Post, 3/30/1982)

**October**

Laxalt confirms that he has turned down an offer to succeed Richard Richards as chairman of the Republican National Committee. “I told them it was not my preference and that’s what I meant,” Senator Laxalt says. “They know how I feel, now they are making another run at me.” (New York Times, 10/13/1982)

**November**

Laxalt, cool to the idea of adding Republican Party chairmanship responsibilities to his Senate duties, will instead take the newly created post of Republican National Committee general chairman. Laxalt says that the determining factor in his decision to take on the job of overseeing political activities of the national party, its congressional campaign committees and the White House political office is his belief that President Reagan will seek reelection in 1984. (National Journal, 11/13/1982)

**December**

Laxalt says that Reagan will tackle the prospect of ever higher federal deficits by agreeing to slow defense spending now and endorsing a contingency plan for increasing taxes after 1984. Laxalt says that he feels that Reagan has adopted “a wholly different perspective” on fiscal problems confronting his administration as a result of candid meetings with his economic advisers and Republicans from the House and Senate. (Washington Post, 1/10/1983)

**1983**

**February**

Laxalt is officially named the general chairman of the Republican National Committee. Frank J. Fahrenkopf, Jr., longtime state party chairman in Laxalt’s home state and a protege of the Senator, will be the national committee’s chairman, succeeding Richard N. Richards. (National Journal, 2/5/1983)
March  The press reports that Laxalt is moving to consolidate his position as top GOP political strategist and that the move may put him at odds with White House chief of staff James A. Baker, III. Laxalt makes it clear that as Republican Party general chairman he expects to pick the campaign manager and other crucial members of the re-election team should Reagan decide to run again. (Newsweek, 3/7/1983)

May  James A. Baker, III and Laxalt devise a plan for sharing power during the presidential race. They agree that the Senator will be the campaign’s chief public spokesman while Baker will coordinate strategy from the White House. A political technician would oversee day-to-day operations until the spring of 1984 when, with the campaign approaching its final stage, a prominent Republican like former Transportation Secretary Drew Lewis would take over as campaign manager. (Newsweek, 5/30/1983)

October  With Laxalt at his side, President Reagan signs a letter authorizing Laxalt to form a committee to work for his re-election but still won’t say whether he will run. Laxalt forwards the letter to the Federal Election Commission, and the “Reagan-Bush ‘84” committee immediately opens a Washington office and begins raising money. (U.S. News and World Report, 10/31/1983)

1984

January  The Reagan Administration announces a plan to finance the building and repairing of major water projects. President Reagan, in a letter addressed to Laxalt, says the government would pay for repairing unsafe Federal dams. (New York Times, 1/25/1984)

In a nationally televised speech from the Oval Office Reagan announces he will seek reelection saying that “our work is not finished” and that his goals in a second term would be “to lift the weak, and to build the peace.” Laxalt, sounding a note of caution, says “We’re going to face a very tough election against a determined, hungry, united Democratic Party.” Laxalt will be part of an informal group that refers to itself as the “board of directors,” which will call all the signals in Reagan’s re-election campaign. (Washington Post, 1/30/1984 and U.S. News & World Report, 1/30/1984)

August  Amid continued ideological cross fire over the 1984 Republican platform, Laxalt says that no office holder, “including the president,” need be locked into the document’s provisions. Laxalt’s effort to free the president and other Republican candidates from most controversial aspects of the conservative-drawn platform comes as delegates pour into Dallas for the formal opening of the Republican National Convention. “I think this platform represents the concerns and aspirations of the party,” Laxalt says. “That doesn’t mean that everybody who is
sitting in office, including the president, has to be locked in totally by the wishes of the party.” (*Washington Post*, 8/19/1984)

Laxalt nominates Reagan at the Republican National Convention in Dallas.

**October**  
Laxalt acknowledges that the president’s closing statement during the debate with Democratic nominee Walter F. Mondale was ineffective, saying that President Reagan fared poorly in his debate last Sunday with Mondale because he had been “brutalized by a briefing process” that overloaded him with statistics. (*Washington Post*, 10/9/1984)

**November**  
Laxalt leads a Congressional delegation to Taiwan designed to assure that country of Washington’s continued friendship during President Reagan’s second term in office. (*New York Times*, 11/11/1984)

1985

**August**  
Laxalt announces he will not seek another term in the Senate.

**October**  
A series of White House warnings to Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos culminates in Sen. Paul Laxalt’s visit to Manila as Ronald Reagan’s personal emissary. Laxalt cautions Marcos against reinstating Gen. Fabian Ver and warns him about the growing communist insurgency.

1986

**April**  
Edward J. Rollins, conservative mastermind of Ronald Reagan’s landslide 1984 re-election, tells friends he’ll jump ship as an informal political adviser to Bush and join Paul Laxalt, if the Senator decides to make a bid for the Republican nomination. Describing Laxalt as the “spiritual father to Reagan’s conservative base,” Rollins says, “If Paul runs I have to be with him.” (*Newsweek*, 4/28/1986)

**June**  
It is reported that former Transportation Secretary Drew Lewis has volunteered his support to Laxalt, if he seeks the 1988 Republican nomination. (*Newsweek*, 6/2/1986)

**December**  

1987

**March**  
Laxalt declines an offer to serve as Reagan’s chief of staff, suggesting instead that
Senator Baker be offered the position. (*Newsweek*, 3/9/1987)

May

Laxalt unveils his 1988 presidential exploratory committee, stacked with old Reagan hands. Heading the group is Richard Wirthlin, Reagan’s pollster since 1968. Other notable Reaganauts sign up including advertising executive and one-time Reagan media consultant Peter Hannaford, former U.S. Treasurer Bay Buchanan and longtime GOP strategist Clifton White. (*Newsweek*, 5/4/1987)
Early Years with Reagan

- Discuss the substance of your Washington meetings with Reagan and his supporters in 1975. Role and responsibilities as chairman of Reagan’s 1976 presidential campaign.

1980/1984 Campaigns and Transitions

- Joining the campaigns. Major challenges faced as campaign chairman during each campaign. Discuss the campaign personnel changes following the 1980 New Hampshire primary. How did the change affect the campaign’s tone and strategy? Vice presidential selection. Consideration of a possible “Reagan-Ford” ticket.
- Role and responsibilities during the transitions. Recruitment and selection of the Cabinet and White House staff. What attributes did Reagan consider most important for his staff and Cabinet officers to possess?
- How did Reagan respond to the 1984 memo from Nixon? Your decision not to join the Administration.
- What changes did you observe in candidate Reagan from the 1976 campaign to the 1980 and 1984 presidential bids?

Congressional Relations in the Reagan Administration

- Describe your role and participation in Congressional relations for the Reagan Administration. What legislative initiatives were most important to Reagan? With which members of the Cabinet and White House staff did you work most closely? Some sources indicate that you had a personal staff in the White House. Was that the case? Participation in the White House Legislative Strategy Group.
- Relationship with Senate leadership, especially Howard Baker. On which legislative issues did you work most closely with the Reagan Administration (regulatory reform, budget, AWACS sale, MX/MPS missile placement, water rights, etc.)? How would you characterize Reagan’s relationship with Congress?

Special Roles During the Reagan Administration

- Service as chair of the White House federalism task forces.
- In your memoir, you discuss your decision to accept the position as general chairman of the Republican National Committee. Which aspects of your RNC duties did you consider most important to the Reagan Presidency? Reagan’s interaction with the RNC during your tenure.
- Experiences representing Reagan abroad. Visit with Marcos in the Philippines. Leading role in Congressional delegation to Taiwan.
- Role in the recruitment and selection of Cabinet and White House staff during and after the transition period.
**Major Events of the Reagan Administration**
- Discuss any special involvement with or recollections about the following events and issues associated with the Reagan period: Supreme Court nominations, assassination attempt, Strategic Defense Initiative, Iran-Contra, tax reform, Grenada, bombing of Libya, INF Treaty, U.S.-Russian relations/summits, MX missile program, bombings of U.S. embassies, air traffic controllers strike, AWACS sale to Saudi Arabia.

**The Reagan Presidency in Retrospect**
- What were the strengths and weaknesses of the Reagan Administration?
- What features of the presidency were missed or misunderstood by the press?
- How should the Reagan presidency be viewed in history?