MAX FRIEDERSDORF TIMELINE
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1960-1970 Friedersdorf leaves a position as an Indianapolis newspaperman to serve as administrative assistant to former U.S. Representative Richard Roudebush (R-Indiana).

1970-1971 When Roudebush makes a bid for the Senate, Friedersdorf runs for the vacated House seat. After losing in a 12-way district caucus race, Friedersdorf takes a position as Associate Director for Congressional Relations with the Office of Economic Opportunity.

1971-1974 Friedersdorf joins the Nixon White House Congressional Relations Office, working his way up to Deputy Director in charge of House operations.


1976-1978 Friedersdorf is named staff director of the Senate Republican Policy Committee by Senator John Tower (R-Texas).

1978-1980 Friedersdorf is appointed by Carter to serve as Chairman of the Federal Election Commission.

1980 In December, Reagan names Friedersdorf Assistant to the President for Legislative Affairs.

1981

January At a meeting with reporters, Friedersdorf says he will pursue a strong working relationship with Congress, paying “very close attention from the beginning to requests and communications with Congress.” As a first step, Reagan meets with Democratic and Republican Hill leaders. Friedersdorf says the administration’s legislative strategy will “concentrate on economics.” (The New York Times, 1/6/1981)

On the 20th, Reagan is inaugurated as the 40th President of the United States. The American hostages in Iran are released on the same day.

February On the 4th, Reagan visits the Capitol to meet with Democratic and Republican House and Senate leaders about his proposed debt ceiling increase and economic initiatives. Speaker of the House Thomas “Tip” O’Neil (D-Mass.) suggests Reagan make personal appeals to Democratic members to support the change to the debt ceiling. Reagan sends out the
letters the next day. (*Reagan’s First Year*, (Congressional Quarterly Inc.: Washington, D.C., 1982), p. 97)

Reagan becomes the first president since 1977 to attend the Washington Press Club’s annual “Salute to Congress.” (*Reagan’s First Year*, p. 97)

In a nationally televised address on the 5th, Reagan outlines his proposed economic plan. The plan calls for new tax cuts and reductions in spending. Specifically, Reagan asks for a 10 percent across the board reduction in personal income taxes for each of the next three years. The President also announces sweeping budget cuts and a hiring freeze for federal employees. (*Public Papers of the President: Ronald Reagan, 1981-1988*)

On the 6th, the Senate votes to increase the public debt ceiling.

During an address to a joint session of Congress on the 18th, Reagan presents the specifics of his economic plan, which includes spending cuts, regulatory reform and tax cuts totaling $53.9 billion. (*Public Papers of the President: Ronald Reagan, 1981-1988*)

The White House announces that additional budget cuts of $13 billion will be necessary to maintain fiscal 1982 spending at the $695.5 billion goal. (*Reagan’s First Year*, p. 98)

On the 10th, Reagan delivers his budget proposal for fiscal year 1982 to Congress. The plan calls for $695.3 billion in spending.

Reagan challenges a Congressional Budget Office (CBO) report that concludes the Reagan administration underestimated the size of the deficit by $20-$25 billion. Reagan makes the remarks during a visit with Congressional leaders at the Capitol on the 17th. (*Reagan’s First Year*, p. 98)

On the 26th, Reagan signs Executive Order 12301, establishing the Presidential Council on Integrity & Efficiency.

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*April*  
On the 9th, Rep. Dan Rostenkowski (D-Ill.) offers a counterproposal to the Reagan tax cut plan. (*1981 Congressional Quarterly Almanac, p. 96*)

Congress considers the President’s economic plan. On the 2nd, the Senate approves a $36.4 billion budget reconciliation package, 88-10. The House
Budget Committee rejects the President’s budget plan, instead approving a measure that includes more defense cuts and less tax cuts than the President proposed. Reagan reportedly rules out compromise on his legislative economic package during a meeting with senior advisors on the 13th. (*Reagan’s First Year*, p. 99-100)

On the 21st, the White House announces its decision to sell Saudi Arabia an arms package worth several billion dollars. The deal would include the sale of five Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) aircraft.

In a nationally televised address to a joint session of Congress on the 28th, Reagan pushes his economic program. Reagan criticizes the defense cuts and higher taxes in the alternative House Budget Committee version of the budget. (*Reagan’s First Year*, p. 101)

**May**

On the 7th, the House approves, 270-154, the administration-supported Gramm-Latta version of the first concurrent resolution of the fiscal 1982 budget. The House votes to substitute the Gramm-Latta amendment for the House Budget Committee bill. On the 12th, the Senate approves the administration-supported first concurrent resolution of the fiscal 1982 budget by a vote of 28-20. (*Reagan’s First Year*, p. 101)

**June**

Reagan offers Congress an alternative tax cut plan. The revised administration plan proposes $37.4 billion in tax cuts for 1982, a lessening of the first rate reduction and the addition of savings incentives and marriage penalty relief. (*1981 Congressional Quarterly Almanac*, p. 91)

The nomination of Ernest W. Lefever as Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs continues to stir up controversy in the Senate. Critics charge that Lefever displays a greater tolerance for human rights abuses in countries that are friendly with the U.S. In the face of strong opposition, the White House asks Friedersdorf to take a greater role in the lobbying on behalf of the nominee. Friedersdorf consults with and advises the State Department staff, which is still in charge of the nomination. On the 5th, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee votes 13-4 to recommend the Senate reject the nomination of Lefever. Hours after the vote, Lefever asks that his nomination be withdrawn. (*1981 Congressional Quarterly Almanac*, p. 18-A; *The Washington Post*, 6/3/1981)

In a meeting with conservative Democrats, Reagan says he would not campaign against Democrats who support his economic program. “I could not oppose someone who supported my principles. I could not look myself in the mirror if I campaigned against you,” says Reagan. (*Reagan’s First Year*, p. 102)
During a news conference on the 16th, the President accuses Speaker O’Neill of “sheer demagoguery” in saying that the administration’s economic plan would not help workers. The following day, the President calls Speaker O’Neill to mend fences. “He and I have a good relationship, and I want it to continue,” says Reagan. (Reagan’s First Year, p. 102)

In a letter to Reagan on the 18th, Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart announces his decision to resign from the Court effective July 3.

On the 25th, the Senate passes, 80-15, the administration-backed budget reconciliation bill for fiscal year 1982. The following day, the House passes, 232-193, the “Gramm-Latta II” budget reconciliation bill. The House had passed an amendment substituting Gramm-Latta II for the House Budget Committee proposal. At a White House news conference following the budget votes, Friedersdorf insists that “a philosophical coalition” has developed in Congress in support of the President’s tax cut plan. (1981 Congressional Quarterly Almanac, pp. 91-104; The New York Times, 6/28/1981)

On the 7th, Reagan nominates Arizona State Appeals Court Judge Sandra Day O’Connor to fill the Supreme Court seat vacated by Justice Potter Stewart.

Friedersdorf says that the administration would oppose strong efforts to oust, in the next election, Democrats who have been supportive of the President’s agenda. Of the Democrats supporting the President, Friedersdorf says, “These 21 are people I think are going to be with him through thick or thin...I would not want to see an all-out effort to defeat those 21” in the 1982 election. (The Washington Post, 7/3/1981)

Republican leaders announce plans for a $500,000 national radio campaign calling for passage of Reagan’s tax cut proposal. (Reagan’s First Year, p. 103)

In a nationally televised address on the 27th, Reagan lobbies for his tax cut plan.

The House (323-107) and Senate (89-11) approve the President’s tax plan on the 29th. Both bodies approve the conference bill on August 4th. The measure includes across the board cuts in personal income taxes and faster depreciation schedules for capital investment. (1981 Congressional Quarterly Almanac, p. 91)
August

In a letter to Congress dated August 5, Reagan states his intention to go ahead with the sale of military equipment to Saudi Arabia, including the AWACS aircrafts. *(Reagan’s First Year, p. 104)*

Reagan signs the tax cut bill on the 13th.

Friedersdorf announces that on August 24th, Reagan will give Congress written notification of his intention to sell military equipment to Saudi Arabia. *(The New York Times, 8/15/1981)*

September

On the 21st, the Senate unanimously confirms Sandra Day O’Connor. She is sworn in as the first female justice of the Supreme Court on the 25th.

In a nationally televised address on economic recovery, Reagan calls for an across the board 12 percent reduction in federal spending for fiscal year 1982 and a $13 billion cut in defense spending over the next three years. *(Reagan’s First Year, p. 105-106)*

October

Reagan announces his $180 billion strategic arms plan on the 2nd. The proposal includes plans for the interim placement of MX missiles in existing silos. *(1981 Congressional Quarterly Almanac, p. 195)*

On the 14th, the House approves a resolution, 301-111, to veto the sale of military equipment, including AWACS, to Saudi Arabia. The Senate rejects a similar resolution, 48-52, on the 28th.

November

On the 23rd, Reagan vetoes H.J. Resolution 357, the continuing appropriations resolution. Congress does not attempt a veto override.

December

On the 3rd, Friedersdorf submits a letter of resignation to Reagan, effective January 2nd, 1982. In his letter to the President, Friedersdorf writes, “Under your leadership the nation has embarked on a course leading again to full economic health, and I consider the passage of your economic recovery program to be a milestone in the course you have chartered for the United States.” *(The New York Times, 12/4/1981)*

On the 29th, Reagan exercises a pocket veto on H.R. 4353, a measure that would have reduced bankruptcy fees for a single company, Lifetime Communities, Inc.

1982

March

On the 11th, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee approves Friedersdorf’s nomination as U.S. General Consul to Bermuda. The Committee approves the appointment over the objections of Senator Claiborne Pell (D-Rhode Island) who thinks the post should be reserved
Friedersdorf: 1982-1985


1983

January

Reagan temporarily recalls Friedersdorf from his post in Bermuda to serve as a liaison between the President’s special commission on the MX missile and Congress. (The New York Times, 1/25/1983)


1985

January

On the 8th, Chief of Staff James Baker and Secretary of the Treasury Don Regan announce they will switch jobs. Administration officials indicate that Regan will undertake a major staff overhaul and will likely name Friedersdorf to a key political post. It is reported that Friedersdorf will fill a newly created position that will oversee a broad array of political functions within the White House including “public liaison with special interest groups and minorities, legislative affairs and intergovernmental relations.” (The New York Times, 1/31/1985)

On the 20th, Reagan is inaugurated for a second term.

February

On the 4th, the President submits his proposed $973.7 billion fiscal year 1986 budget to Congress. The President’s budget projects a deficit of $180 billion in fiscal year 1986 and calls for cuts in domestic programs and an inflation-adjusted increase in defense spending. House and Senate committees immediately begin hearings on the proposed administration budget. (1985 Congressional Quarterly Almanac, p. 427)

On the 5th, the President announces the appointment of Friedersdorf as Assistant to the President and Legislative Strategy Coordinator. Friedersdorf will have broad responsibility for the administration’s congressional relations and legislative strategy. Of his decision to take the position, Friedersdorf says, “I really feel deeply about his programs. This year is like ’81 - the President is at the peak of his popularity. Those of us who can help him ought to be there. I could see they were trying to put together a crackerjack team.” M.B Oglesby, Jr. will continue to handle the White House’s day-to-day operations on the Hill. Contrary to earlier press reports, Reagan creates a separate post, filled by Edward J. Rollins, to handle political and intergovernmental affairs. Reagan also brings in Patrick J. Buchanan to serve as communications director. All three

In his State of the Union address on the 6th, Reagan urges Congress to adopt major tax reform. (Public Papers of the President: Ronald Reagan, 1981-1989)

Following a 13-month delay, the Senate, 63-31, confirms Edwin Meese III as Attorney General.

March

On the 6th, Reagan vetoes H.R. 1096, a bill to authorize emergency relief for famine victims in Africa and emergency farm credit relief. Reagan opposes the farm credit provisions of the bill. There is no attempt by Congress to override the veto. (1985 Congressional Quarterly Almanac, p. 542)

Friedersdorf tells a meeting of Republican Senate aides that the administration “will help our friends first” in providing presidential campaign assistance to senators seeking reelection in 1986. To that end, the administration will pay close attention to senatorial support for its programs such as the budget, tax reform, MX missile and aid to Nicaraguan rebels. White House spokesman Larry Speakes publicly acknowledges the administration strategy on the 15th. (Los Angeles Times, 3/15/1985)

Possibly ending a three-year battle on the subject, both the House and the Senate vote to approve funding for 21 MX missiles in the fiscal 1985 budget. (1985 Congressional Quarterly Almanac, p. 14)

April

Following two weeks of intense negotiations, the White House and Republican senators reach an agreement on the budget on the 4th. Of the compromise agreement Friedersdorf says, “The idea was to get something passed. We’re not into symbolism, we’re into passing something. You not only need a consensus, but a majority.” (The New York Times, 4/7/1985)

On the 24th, Reagan delivers a televised address to the nation on the federal budget and deficit reduction.

May

Reagan announces a trade embargo against Nicaragua.

On the 28th, Reagan delivers a televised address to the nation on his proposal for tax reform. The central element of Reagan’s plan calls for a three-bracket tax system with rates of 15, 25 and 35 percent. (Public Papers of the President: Ronald Reagan, 1981-1988)
June

On the 12th, the House approves U.S. aid to the Nicaraguan Democratic Resistance.

It is reported that Friedersdorf objects to a RNC project called “Operation Open Door” that sends letters bearing Reagan’s signature to Democratic voters, urging them to change party registration. Friedersdorf believes that the campaign will undermine support among conservative House Democrats for the administration’s agenda. (*The Washington Post*, 6/26/1985)

July

It is reported that Friedersdorf has talked with Regan about leaving the White House in October, but may stay longer. When he leaves, Friedersdorf will return to his post in Bermuda under an arrangement made when he agreed to return to the White House. Edward J. Rollins is also expected to leave the White House in the coming months. (*The Washington Post*, 7/28/1985)

August

On the 1st, the House adopts the fiscal 1986 budget resolution.

In anticipation of Friedersdorf’s departure, Regan gives M.B. Oglesby expanded duties for congressional liaison. (*The Washington Post*, 8/10/1985)

September

It is reported that the administration will insist Congress deal with tax reform before the end of session, going so far as to call them back for a special session. Friedersdorf says of Reagan, “I don’t think he’s going to let Congress go home without finishing that subject.” (*U.S. News & World Report*, 9/30/1985)

Reagan requests Congress appropriate $54 million for police aid and supplemental military assistance for El Salvador and four other Central America countries. (*1985 Congressional Quarterly Almanac*, p. 80)

October

Friedersdorf leaves the White House to return to Bermuda as U.S. Consul General.

1986

February

On the 10th, Reagan appoints Friedersdorf a member of the President’s Commission on Executive Exchange.

1987

May

**August**

In response to Russian claims that the U.S.’s refusal to discuss removing its warheads from West German Pershing missiles is preventing a deal on medium range missiles, Friedersdorf says “The United States will not negotiate on third country systems. Therefore, the German Pershing A-1 missiles have not been, are not and will not be on the table in U.S.-Soviet intermediate-range force negotiations.” Friedersdorf insists that any such decisions must be made by West Germany. (*The Toronto Star*, 8/6/1987)

**October**

During a press conference, Soviet Lt. General Anatoly Kuntsevich says U.S. plans to produce a new form of chemical weapons this year would derail talks at the Geneva summit regarding an international ban on chemical weapons. Friedersdorf, in the audience at the time, challenges Kuntsevich’s claims and defends U.S. policy. After the press conference, Friedersdorf tells reporters that the Soviet reports underestimate the size of their stockpile, which still greatly outsizes that of the U.S. (*The Washington Post*, 10/6/1987)

**November**

Friedersdorf says a tour of U.S. chemical arms stockpiles by Soviet scientists is a “confidence building measure. And confidence building is very important now when we are at the final stages of our negotiations on chemical weapons.” In response to a prediction by a Russian official that an agreement on a chemical weapons ban could be reached by next year, Friedersdorf says, “I think that’s overly optimistic.” (*The New York Times*, 11/20/1987)

**1988**

**June**

A United Nations special session on disarmament ends without reaching any agreement on guidelines for future arms reductions. Despite the failure to reach an agreement, Friedersdorf argues that “We have a new understanding...one that I believe is widely shared. It is and understanding of how to build upon the successes achieved in the past several years, steps that should take us to a world of increased stability and security, toward a peaceful world which we all most earnestly seek.” (*The Toronto Star*, 6/27/1988)

**July**

In an effort to promote increased openness and accelerate negotiations, Friedersdorf releases the location of chemical weapons production facilities in the U.S. (*The Washington Post*, 7/29/1988)
Joining the Administration

• Discuss any interaction you had with Reagan while he was governor.
• Did you play any role in Reagan’s 1980 campaign?
• Were you consulted about the transition and staffing of the new administration?
• Discuss the circumstances surrounding your entry into the Reagan administration.

Office of Legislative Affairs

• Describe your role and responsibilities as Assistant to the President for Legislative Affairs.
• How much control did you have in staffing the White House Office of Legislative Affairs and the congressional relations posts in the departments?
• Discuss the range and type of activities that occupied the time of legislative affairs staff.
• Describe your relationships and interactions with members of the White House staff and Cabinet (Chief of Staff, Counselor to the President, policy development staff, press staff, Office of Public Liaison, cabinet councils, etc.). Discuss the frequency and nature of your interactions with President Reagan.
• What were the purposes and activities of the White House Legislative Strategy Group (policymaking, tactics, political operations, veto strategy, etc.)?
• What major issues and legislation most occupied the time of the legislative affairs staff (budget, tax cuts, O’Connor nomination, appointments, Strategic Defense Initiative, MX missile program, AWACS sale to Saudi Arabia, aid to Contras, congressional elections, etc.)?
• Describe your relationships and interactions with congressional affairs staff in the departments.
• Why did you decide to leave the White House at the end of 1981?
• Discuss the circumstances of your return to the White House in 1985.
• How did your position as Assistant to the President for Legislative Strategy differ from your previous position as head of Reagan’s Office of Legislative Affairs? Discuss the division of congressional affairs responsibilities between yourself and M.B. Oglesby. Were there any significant changes made to the congressional liaison operation?
• What changes did you observe in the management of the White House under Regan?

Congressional Relations During the Reagan Administration

• How would you characterize Reagan’s relationship with Congress during the first year? How did it change over time? What were the chief causes of change?
• How would you assess the effectiveness of Reagan’s dealings with Congress during the first year?
• To what do you attribute Reagan’s early legislative successes?
• Discuss Reagan’s legislative strategy. What was the administration’s veto strategy?
• What legislative initiatives were most important to Reagan?
• What were the primary areas of conflict between the Congress and the President during your tenure?
• Did you observe differences in Reagan’s dealings with the House and the Senate?
• Discuss Reagan’s relationships with both the Democratic and Republican congressional leadership.
• Was the President actively involved in matters concerning congressional party discipline?

Other Special Roles During the Administration

• Discuss the circumstances that led to your selection as general consul to Bermuda.
• Role and activities as the U.S. representative to the Geneva conference on disarmament.
Comparison with Previous Administrations

• Having served on the congressional liaison staff during previous administrations, you are in a unique position to offer a comparative perspective on presidential congressional relations. Discuss parallels and differences observed between the Reagan administration and previous administrations.
• How effective was Reagan’s administration in comparison with previous administrations?

Working with Reagan

• How would you characterize Reagan’s management style? What type of advice and information did he seek from staff?
• Discuss your recollections of your interactions with Reagan.

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? In what ways has his legacy changed over time?
TIMELINES

- Max Friedersdorf Timeline, prepared by Darby A. Morrisroe, Miller Center of Public Affairs, University of Virginia, 6/19/2002.

SELECTED WRITINGS AND PUBLIC STATEMENTS BY MAX FRIEDERSDORF

OFFICE OF LEGISLATIVE AFFAIRS


REAGAN ADMINISTRATION CONGRESSIONAL RELATIONS: FIRST TERM

Joining the Administration


General Commentary


1981 Presidential Addresses to Congress

Budget/Taxes


Appointments


Foreign Policy – General

Saudi Arms Sale

Arms Plan/MX Missile Program


Departure for Bermuda Post

**Return to the White House/General Commentary**


**1985 Presidential Addresses to Congress**


1986 Elections


Budget/Economic Issues


Aid to Contras

MX Missile
• “Reagan, Congress Compromise on MX Missile,” 1985 Congressional Quarterly Almanac, pp. 119-129.

OTHER SPECIAL ROLES DURING THE REAGAN ADMINISTRATION


SUGGESTED TOPICS


- Topics for Filmed Interview with Max Friedersdorf, provided by Max Friedersdorf, 2/15/1996.